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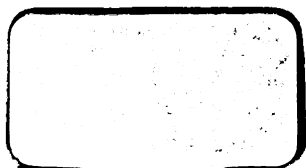
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FOOTPRINTS in the SNOW

THE LAYER . . .

And

BY BENJAMIN L. CHILDS.

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NOW

THE LITTLE OF LANCASHIRE

A Lancashire Story.

BY BENJAMIN BRIERLEY.

AUTHOR OF "TALES AND SKETCHES OF LANCASHIRE LIFE," "MEMOIRS
OF WATKINS," ETC.

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TO

SAMUEL BAMFORD,

AUTHOR OF "PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF A RADICAL," ETC.,

THE OLDEST LIVING

EXPONENT OF THE FEELINGS AND MANNERS OF THE

WORKING CLASSES OF LANCASHIRE,

THIS STORY

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

THE LAYROCK OF LANGLEY-SIDE

CHAPTER I.

It was a happy time in Lancashire, was the Christmas of 1860. Three prosperous years had succeeded the panic of '57, and the great commercial blight of '62 and '63 was an event undreamt of by the most sensitive alarmist. Manchester and its tributary towns shot mountains of cotton down to Liverpool, thence to be borne over every sea. The sky was continually clouded by industrial smoke. Furnaces blazed, and white-heated ore lighted up thousands of swarthy faces that were soon to cast off their grimy covering and put on the cheerful expressions of festivity. Each hill-side displayed, nightly, tiers upon tiers of illumined windows, shining up in the welkin like palaces of light; and scarcely a work-room was there in all those colossal hives that did not ring forth the "Christmas Hymn" as loudly as if sung by some cathedral choir. "Hallelujahs" mingled with the screech and roar of machinery, which seemed to grow louder as the eve of the twenty-fifth approached, when the loom and spindle would cease their motion,

furnaces would be "raked," and in the place of all these associations of industry the revelries of the season would commence.

But there were villages and hamlets in the very laps of these prosperous towns that had bare doings during that winter. Hand-weaving was slack ; manufacturers had failed, and with the fortunes of these bankrupts went the means of many a dependent home that had known better days not long before. But as "it is an ill wind that blows nobody good," so did these commercial hurricanes winnow the chaff from the grain ; carrying away the men of "straw," and leaving the more substantial but little worse for the ordeal.

Langley-side was one of these suffering villages. It was cursed by two reckless tradesmen, manufacturers of certain branches of fancy weaving. They both had risen from nothing—how nobody knew, except such as were in the secrets of their counting-house. They were playfellows together when young, and had conjointly ruined half the boys in the village, whom they cheated at marbles and overreached in many things. They had often, when weavers, been seen in places where they had no proper business, and under very suspicious circumstances. In short, it was whispered by the gossips that they had dealings with—no, not his Satanic majesty, but with certain tradesmen who go about at midnight, carrying strange-looking bags with them. It was supposed they sold silk entrusted to them by their employers, and hoarded up the fruits

of these felonious practices that they might one day become manufacturers themselves. This is a probable version of their early history ; for they were seldom known to stick at trifles ; and when the law did not absolutely interfere, or could not be made available against them, they were sure to take great advantages to their own side of the transaction. They carried on, for a time, separate establishments up in Birchwood, where the work was fetched by the Langley-side weavers, and drove, at times, what is termed a "roaring trade." But it was a matter of much note that they always played into each other's hands, and that when other people were doing little they would contrive to be busy ; sending out fabulous quantities of work, and crowding their warehouses daily with weavers, who, at such times, were anxious to get anything to do.

It was a puzzle to many people who pretended to understand commercial matters, how these two upstarts got on in their business ; and, as their works extended from small, dingy, tumble-down cottages to several-storeyed and well-built factories, the ordinary, plodding manufacturer, who strove to be unfashionably honest and straightforward in his dealings, had to "narrow" his transactions, and keep a constant look-out for fear of commercial breakers cropping up unwarned of, and endangering his speculations.

Of the latter class was one Aaron Hartley, a worthy gentleman, who had grown old in his pursuit, and

made a tolerable fortune by it. He "put out"* a class of mixed silk and cotton fabrics that were much in request some years ago, and which was a favourite kind of work amongst the humbler classes of weavers. Aaron was a kind employer, esteemed by his work-people, and looked up to as a father by them. His warehouse was a snug little place just out of the village, and was scarcely detached from the house in which he lived. Trees grew about it; uncommercial-looking ivy invested the walls, and plants bloomed upon the window-sills. A stranger would have taken the place to be a school, or a chapel, especially if he had heard the winders singing, as they sometimes would be, the hymns sung at the schools they frequented. Often in summer weavers might have been seen lounging about the grounds, or taking a hand amongst the hay while they were waiting to be "fitted" with their work. An army of geese pastured on the sward in front, or gabbled in the pool close by. You would hear the sound of milking as you listened to the hum of the winding frames; for the "Hillock" was a farmstead as well as a manufactory, and the two occupations worked so harmoniously together that you could hardly tell which you were most in love with, or which you would have given up for the other. "Bearing-home" to this place was a pleasure to weavers over and above the

* "Gave out" to be woven—manufactured: hence the term "putter-out," applied by weavers to the person who manages the weaving department for a manufacturer.

gratification afforded by the receipt of earnings. There was no one to insult or take advantage of their poverty; nobody to brow-beat them, nor unjustly deduct "abatements" from their hard-earned wages. There was a genial understanding betwixt master and man, and nothing ever occurred to mar that understanding. How could it then be otherwise than a pleasure to visit such a place, and feel the consciousness that you contributed something towards its prosperity?

Mr. Hartley's dwelling was of a character to match his other establishment. It had nothing assuming about it; a small cottage built in an old-fashioned style, with porch-shaped windows that seemed to have festoons of curtains about them, and a garden laid out after no style, but overrun with luxuriance, were the chief features of this rural homestead, if we except the worthy occupants. But our friend had a jewel in his household that he valued more than house or business. He had an only daughter, the last remaining of a numerous family, most of whom died in infancy.

Mary Hartley was a good girl, and as pretty as flesh and blood, without paint, could make her. She was not one of your grand beauties; for nobody loves them but they who would worship peacocks, cockatoos, and birds of paradise. Mary's qualities of mind and disposition would so win upon your esteem that you would forget whether she were a blonde or a brunette; whether she were short or tall or of middle stature. Her eye

might be lustrous, her cheek rosy, her form of faultless symmetry; but these beauties would not call your attention from that something so loveable in the expression of her voice and movement; that sweetness which clothed her as with a silken garment, which reposed in each look, and gave a charming grace to her most ordinary habits. The loss of her mother entailed upon Miss Hartley all the household duties that might have belonged to such a parent. But she was so cheerful under them that they seemed not a task to her; and their home was such a nest of quiet happiness that you would, without hesitation, have concluded that there was still something akin to paradise on earth. Mary was the beloved of others than her father. The servants loved her, the neighbours regarded her as their benefactress, and there was not a youngster in all Langley-side that would not have worked a day in the garden for only the pleasure of obliging her.

But there was one poor fellow that came every morning to the "Hillock," whether in summer or winter, rain or sunshine, to perform a duty that he appeared to regard as a sort of religious exercise. That duty was to report to Mary who amongst the villagers were in pressing want, that she might relieve their necessities by her ready bounty.

Harry Andrew was a weaver lad, sharing a cottage with a widowed mother up in the hillside, where the poorest people lived. He was the sole support of his parent, toiling at a cotton loom from early morning to the late night, making only a bare living by his

industry. But he had a stout heart, an unfretful disposition, and a hand that never shirked its duty of bread-winning, humble as was his vocation. It was refreshing, on a winter's morning, to see him trudging over the snow to some of the cottage doors on the hill-side, to learn who had not meal for their porridge, or coals for their fire,—often leaving but little at home after he and his mother had made their humble breakfast. He would not, when out on these excursions, be muffled up in coats or wrappers, should the day be never so cold. A head naturally curly, and a face ruddy as the winter sun, looked as if they imparted a warmth to the whole of the thinly-clad body. A white apron, shading into blue about the waist, a pair of stocking sleeves drawn over his otherwise bare arms, corduroys and cord vest, thick home-knit stockings and thicker clogs, with a shirt as white as the snow he trod, but of coarse texture nevertheless, completed both his summer and winter costume. It was a rare occasion when he put on a hat, and the article which served for the purpose of head-covering was of neither shape nor fashion, but appeared to have been “blocked” into its proportions by the curly head it sheltered. He was a genial fellow ; happy and good natured, and, moreover, a marvellous whistler, emulating the lark in both its early rising and in the shrillness of its song. In truth, he was known among the moor people by the cognomen of the Layrock of Langley-side,* a name which the schoolmaster had given him.

* Layrock: a local name for the lark.

The ballads of the county would furnish Harry with themes for his early carollings. The loves of "Will and Jenny," and his father's hunting ditties were the favourites of his humble repertory; and he would troll them over in their wonted succession,—sending over his shuttle and drawing down the cloth as if such actions were invented to accompany the music. His mother would often join him with a song as she sat at the wheel; and ere the village had awakened from its slumber the rattle of the loom and the "huzz" of the bobbin-wheel, softened into harmony by the singing which accompanied their motions, would often signal the neighbours to their occupations.

The home of Widow Andrew was a thatched cottage of one storey, with a garden in front sloping down to the river. The windows of this structure afforded but little light to the interior from their being so small and heavily leaded, as well as from their being darkened by the hedges which grew in thorny luxuriance about them. The house was divided into two apartments; one a sleeping-room for the old woman, and the other as a "house-place" for the several duties belonging to the household. This latter also served as a "loom-place," as well as a dormitory for Harry, his loom occupying the back part, and his bed being slung over the loom like a hammock. It was a study to see him mount his "pecarch," or "flyin' up," as he would say, to take his nightly rest. First merrily frisking about the house, in free-and-easy costume; then making a spring at the top loom-rail, he would

be ensconced between the blankets in a twinkling. Sometimes he would forget himself, and, as if fancying he was still at the loom, he would burst out with "The bright rosy morning," or, "My Kitty came from Birchwood," and would only become reminded of his situation by his mother calling out, "Harry, theaw poucement! lay that whistle bye, wilita, an' go t' sleep." "Aw'm liket' do another verse, moather," he would sometimes say; then fire off with an additional strain, going over the chorus twice as a finisher, and the next that was heard of him would be a sonorous snore, or the regular breathing of quiet slumber.

Harry was a kind of benevolent spy. Light-hearted and careless as he might seem, he had his serious thoughts and calculations, but always reserved them for his solitary moments. It would appear as though instinct guided him to the homes where help was needed most; but the truth of it is, he had calculated the time of their "downings" and their waitings for work, and the probable necessities of such a period. Their incomes he would know almost to a penny; a fact which no one need wonder at who is acquainted with the habits of Lancashire weavers. From familiarising himself with these calculations, Harry would know almost to a day when to expect some family being at "far end," and would fashion an excuse for what would seem to be a neighbourly visit to such a home; disguising by frivolous gossip the real purpose of his visit. It was thus that his presence would sometimes

burst like a ray of sunshine over a destitute hearth, as his welcome voice rang a cheerful "good mornin'" to the starving family. Gaily would he enter into some trifling village gossip; canvass his neighbour about his knowledge of what kind of work was doing best; then, as if he had suddenly recollected himself, he would say: "Bo' aw mun be off t' mi loom," and would dash out of the house as unceremoniously as he entered, perhaps to burst out into a fit of crying before he could get away from the door-step. In less than an hour succour would come to the distressed family; whence they well knew, but could not always account for the manner in which their benefactress became acquainted with their wants.

On the eve of the 25th December, Harry, after a hard day's toil, retired with his usual briskness to his nest over the loom. He slept soundly until midnight; for he had quite forgotten that the turning of twelve o'clock would usher in Christmas Day, and it was not until he was awakened by the ringing of the church bells that he became aware of the happy event they were celebrating. He listened for awhile to the sweet sound of those midnight bells; incorporated his soul as it were with the music, and then with the joyous cadences floating about his pillow, he went over again into dreamland.

But he had not slept long ere he was again awakened. The bells had ceased their ringing, but in its place another harmony stole up the hill-side in softly breathed murmurs—faint and indistinct at first,

but with pauses that the dreamy soul filled up with those spirit-chords that rhapsodists have termed "whisperings of the angels." Now the strains would grow louder and more connected, until the words of the prophet minstrel who sang of the Babe of Bethlehem, became sweetly audible to the listener,—

In David's city, shepherds, ye shall find
The long foretold Redeemer of mankind.

When the hymn was finished, a few minutes' silence followed ; but Harry slept not. Broad waking succeeded his half-conscious state, and he lay pondering over the mysteries that seemed to hang upon the hallowed time. Presently he heard the sound of footsteps about the door ; voices accompanied ; and, before he had time to reflect upon the character of such a visitation, "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn," broke forth in full chorus at the window. There was a voice mingling with that choir which awoke a new feeling within his breast. His soul thrilled with a strange emotion. A divine presence appeared to be shadowed before him. He felt as though his soul was being borne upwards by a mysterious power ; and, long after the music had ceased, he listened to the fancied echoes that murmured through his being,—gazed inwardly upon an image that seemed fashioned out of the music,—an image so angelic that it dispelled for a while all thoughts of earth, and invested his imagination as with a heaven of its own creating.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS DAY broke over Langley-side with a flush of winter glory that made every heart rejoice. The hills, that looked from their icy world down upon the village, threw up a halo from their snow-mantled summits which told the sun to be ascending with more than usual brilliancy. The highest peaks glittered like diamonds, and the warmer hues of the rainbow softened with a deep golden margin the round outline of the lower uplands. Already rays of sunlight shot over the dipping mountain's cape, reflecting themselves in cottage windows, and tinging with their radiance the smoke which from every chimney went up rejoicing. "Noon Sun" seemed lifting his rugged face to heaven as if eloquent with worship that the valleys appeared to echo. Around, the snow covered as with a maidenly robe the broad landscape, which westward runs out into level fields that in the distance mingle in the blue sky. Everything abroad appeared to be imbued with a sense of profound but serene quietude. The sharp-limbed pines that make fretful music when roused by the sobbing tempest, now stood in prim stillness, or gently swayed to the passing breeze. The torrent withheld its tumultuous voice, as if spell-bound by

the silent majesty of the grand old hills whose jewelled crowns were reflected on its still surface. Even the sounds of village life were hushed. The little smithy sent not its flashes through its chinky door, accompanied by the sharp ring of its anvil. The loom was silent; the carts in the farm yard were motionless, and the usual hum proceeding from industrial occupations gave place to the softer tones which the Christmas bells were discoursing.

That day were the poor of Langley-side to be fed. The roast and the boiled were to smoke on every table; pots of the "Christmas brew" were to wink beside it, and the fires that were to be kindled on every hearth were to be such as, with the combined influences of the meat and drink, would warm each heart into the remembrance of summer time and plenty. In addition to these family treats, where all of every age could partake, there were to be gatherings of the oldest people of both sexes at the "Pig and Fork," where a "substantial repast," as the invitations described the feast, would be provided for the men at dinner time, and a cup of "tea and rum" in the evening for the women. Bless their old hearts! A knife and fork, instead of a porridge-spoon, with which Langley-side had been fed during the autumn months, and down into deep winter. "Tea and rum," to warm up faces that had so long worn the look and cold shadow of down-heartedness!—what a blessed boon! And there would be singing and dancing—dancing feet and dancing hearts. And

what a long, long time it looked since they had either! for the "wakes" had found the village in its tribulation,—when neither rush-cart, nor morris-dancers, nor club-feasts, brightened up the gloom that poverty had made. A time when glorious mornings cheered not; when Nature's bright face was like a Hebe at a funeral, smiling at the complexion of sorrow; when the full corn-field contrasted with the empty loom-house, and the joy of the harvest-home was tempered by the sadness of those whom plenty seemed to have forsaken. But now there were to be "old times" again, for a day at least. "Old times!" so much brighter in the memory than in their own day, when there were older times remembered, and older times still beyond those—the happiest being the farthest in the past!

And must none but old people rejoice? Are there no young hearts that it would do well to fill with a throb of the general gladness? Behold, and listen! The day is getting advanced, and Nature is waking into melody. The sun's rays feel as warm as if they were calling forth the May-flowers in the meadows. Silvery drops falling from the eaves are tinkling round each cottage, making the music which summer knows not in its brightest days. Each pebble glittering under the "easing" is a little Christmas bell, mingling its tiny voice with the deeper harmony rung from the old wooden tower over Waverlow, and which swells and retires in *Æolian* cadences as the breeze plays round the hill-side. There are children's voices,

too, making May-day glee in the village ; and if they bear not garlands of flowers for their "queen" and her little maids of honour, they carry whole groves of holly and branches of laurel to weave out the decorations for their school. Out of the woods and gardens they come, shouting and waving their evergreen trophies, scattering showers of snow and gladness about them, and making little bright patches of slide as they go. In the school-house the currant-cake is heaped, the oranges are piled, and little cups and saucers are arranged in little squares on dainty-looking trays, and the fragrance of spices floats on the atmosphere, making a very India of the humble place.

In the evening there will be such a jingling of those cups and saucers ; such a steaming of ambrosial tea ; such bright faces twinkling round the tables ; such merry feet kicking against benches, and such a din of chatter and clatter as would awaken a kind feeling even in the breast of a misanthrope. And there will be playings at "Silly old man," "Hitch hatch," "Twos and threes," and "Old Roger is dead," and games which are played only at Christmas. And then there will be such a taking of hands together as makes little friendships on the spot that may afterwards grow into stronger links lasting through a lifetime. And for this concert of fresh human feeling,—welling up into little harmonies of love and joy that must carry their influences to every home, and strengthen family and neighbourly bonds,—the village was indebted to Aaron Hartley. But not to

Aaron alone, There was a "ministering angel" in that house of his up on the "Hillock," that had whispered some of its sympathies into a susceptible ear. That ear was the key to a tender heart ;—a heart that had never had its mines of goodness explored, but retained its full springs ready at the touch to scatter showers of beneficence around.

Aaron had been somewhat estranged from society of late. His business demanded all his attention. The competition induced by people who had no moral principle to keep them within the limits of fair dealing, had made it hard work for him to make the two sides of the account yield a profitable result, so he had kept himself to his home and his warehouse, spending his time betwixt the society of his book-keeper and that of his beloved daughter, to the utter neglect of the bar-parlour oracles of the "Fig and Fork." But on this occasion he had resolved to leave business to the care of itself for a day or two, assigning as one reason for so doing that it was as good lost as found, and for another that he fancied he was getting selfish and misanthropical, and that a little shaking up amongst his neighbours would put his disposition more in harmony with his old feelings. Good, easy, considerate Aaron ! What a blessing wert thou at all times to the people of Langley-side ; but more particularly now when the poor had greater need of thy bounty.

Aaron had the son of an old friend visiting ; a young, gay, handsome, and accomplished gentleman,

who had turned a fortune left by his father to good account, by speculating in corn and cotton,—a rather hazardous enterprise in these times. By good luck, and, more than all, by good management, this young merchant had distanced many a known crafty speculator, and quadrupled his means in a wonderfully short space of time. But the business was like smuggling, he said; all very well while your cargoes got safely landed; but the moment the coastguard were down upon them, you were in a fair way for losing the profits of a dozen successful ventures, and the prospect of being wrecked into the bargain. So he closed his last account, stuck up “to let” in his office window at Liverpool, and with the world yet before him, to be enjoyed now rather than used, he gave himself up to those pastimes and amusements that might be supposed to afford a life of pleasure to a young active fellow, whose time had hitherto been absorbed in the game of money making. To him a life of indolence was the most dreary prospect that could present itself. He could not, like some people, shut himself up, and doze his time away. He must be doing something, no matter what,—anything, to keep down bodily rust and mental nausea. What if he tried “love making?” Oh! the delight that this suggestion gave him! Love making! Beauty,—passion,—the delights of every romance concentrated in one dream of love! What were the anchorite’s vision of futurity to this paradise of the heart; this feast of the gods? But where was the dear object

upon which such a heartfull of devotion might be lavished? It was all very well, George Watson,—you lying in bed on a frosty winter's morning, with your crimson curtains reflecting a cheerful fire's glow, and throwing it over your pillow as if fairies were dancing about you. It was all very well—reading “Evangeline” from gilt leaves, and having your imagination helped by delightfully wrought woodcuts. It was all very well—throwing the book aside, and allowing your musical box to tinkle you into a delicious dream. All very well—thus pursuing a phantom, an ideal—with your heart so young in Love's feverish school, and your account at the bankers' reckoned by thousands. But when you get into flesh and blood life; when your fancy drops from its stilts to rove amongst substantial beings, who may possess many of the infirmities of our poor human nature, and few of those qualities with which your imagination has endowed them; maybe then your Arcadia will lose some of its charms, and the angelic forms with which you have peopled it fade into the gross realities of this common-place world of ours. But dream on!

It was when thus lazily employed,—taking his chocolate in bed, whilst his slippers were warming on the fender, and his clean shirt hung white and crisp to air, that George Watson received a letter, enclosed in a pink envelope, and sealed in a very delicate and lady-like fashion. Leisurely breaking the seal as if expecting it to be merely an invitation to one of the

many assemblies or concerts that were to be held in the immediate neighbourhood, and to which he was careless about going, he read as follows :—

The "Hillock," near Birchwood,

December 20th, 1860.

Dear George Watson,—My father bids me present the compliments of the season to you, and to ask the favour of your company to dinner on Christmas Day, if you would not think it a bore to spend a day or two in this dull place of ours. He says he has been thinking about you for some time, and has often wished to consult you upon a matter where your opinion and advice would be most welcome. We cannot offer you such society as probably you are accustomed to mix amongst; but such as we have is made up of honest and very good people; and I am sure they would be proud to have you amongst them. Besides, you cannot think how beautiful the country is just now, with such a sweet covering of snow upon the ground, and I think I have heard you say, when you were quite a boy, that you loved the country. Most people do in summer; but my favourite season is the winter. It is so sober—so sad; so like the quiet spirit of my mother when she was living. But if I write in this strain I shall frighten you, for you will think we are gone into a couple of Quakers, and that we chide the flowers for looking gay and pretty. But will you come? Now, say you will, and I will get your room prepared for you; you know which it is, Georgy; that over the laundry, which you used to say looked like a Punch and Judy show box, with a glass window. Your old sweetheart Maggy is still with us. I told her I was writing to you, at which she blushed as red as a poppy. I think the girl gets prettier; that is, if I am a judge of beauty. But don't let me turn your head with such nonsense. If a woman gets a pen in hand she is sure to make herself look foolish. But you know me, George, and that I always felt like a sister towards you; so you will make allowance for my familiarity

Well, we shall expect you, so you need not write anything like, "I regret to say," or "another engagement." Oh, I forgot that it was possible you might have other and more attractive engagements on hand, and, perhaps, promised,—you see we are so selfish.

But wishing you a "Merry Christmas," at all events, and hoping it may be spent with us, I am, your affectionate friend,

MARY HARTLEY.

George Watson, Esq.

"Bless the lovely fingers that wrote and the sweet lips that indited the letter!" exclaimed George Watson, kissing the signature with a fervour that showed him to be more than pleased with the contents of the epistle. "I will gratify your wishes, my dear girl, by posting myself up at your little snuggery on an earlier date than you may expect me," and he sprang out of bed with the liveness of one strong in manhood, and impatient for a dash through the country on a journey of love and pleasure.

Having completed his toilet, he ordered his travelling trunk, and making his housekeeper a Christmas present that made her old heart leap for joy, he, in less than an hour from the receipt of the letter, found himself taking his ticket at the Edgehill Station, *en route* for Manchester.

O, the pleasure of feeling the first jerk of an express train, that we know will have to cleave the wind like lightning, when we are eager to reach our destination! The crowing of the whistle as the train clears the the company of sleepy-looking carriages that may happen to be "shunted" on "sidings;" the sudden

flash of light upon newspapers and books opened ready, and waiting to be read; the rapidity with which slips of boards painted over with letters that appear to have gone mad with chasing each other, fly past us; the rushing under bridgeways, the momentary darkness of a tunnel, and the fog of steam unveiling the daylight again as if a curtain were swept aside too gradually to be rude; and then the flight through a wooded country, where the trees are dancing reels; and bounding again over plains and mosses, dashing over watercourses, through tunnels and "cuttings," until the peculiarly sulphurous smell that is wafted through the carriage windows, tells us the "break" is pulling us up at the end of a long stage.

George Watson felt all these varied and, in some instances, delightful sensations, as he was being whirled on his journey to Manchester.

He wondered if all the people who departed soberly from the station were bent upon Christmas enjoyments. The expression of their countenances, and even their whole manner, failed to betray a gleam of such intentions, if they were; for some looked cold and uninviting, whilst others seemed to be impressed with a care they could not leave behind them. He doubted the possibility of any of them feeling as happy as he did, or of their having so joyful an errand before them. Perhaps, some were going on a dull, tedious visit to some phlegmatic friend whose tip-top happiness is to eat turkey and drink wine in silence; say "yes" and "no" over dessert, and, after listening to

a drowsy tune on the piano, go off to sleep. A fig for such enjoyments, if enjoyments they could be to such people! He pitied them; in his heart he pitied them; those dreary folks who appear to have no purpose on earth but to go "respectably" through life, and then pass decently out of it.

With reflections somewhat after this character our young friend alighted from the train, and, after shouldering several stupid-looking specimens of a slow order of humanity, who seemed to have no end of carefully wrapped and well corded trunks, with an attendance of more flimsy companions in the shape of band-boxes, parcels, *et cætera*, he took the first cab that offered, and was the next moment bounding on his way to Langley-side.

Miss Hartley had just laid down a pleasant Christmas story-book, and was looking out upon the fine sweep of country which the "Hillock" commanded, when she caught sight of the humble conveyance above alluded to, toiling up the rather difficult road along the hill-side. A vehicle of that kind was such a rarity in that part of the country that she wondered not a little whither its destination could be. Now there is a short conference betwixt the driver and his fare; the whip is flourished, the reins tightened, the horses make a slight turn, and presently the wheels are rattling or crackling up the avenue leading to the "Hillock."

"Good morning, and a Merry Christmas to you, Mary!" sang out George Watson, as, jumping from

the cab, he caught that young lady all surprise and blushes at the door. "You see I thought I would be my own postman, and instead of sending you word that I was coming a few days hence, I have come personally to tell you that I shall not budge from this place so long as I can find the slightest excuse for staying. Bless you, Mary! what a woman you're grown into!"

"I am so glad you are come, George," said Miss Hartley, releasing herself from the tight hugging which the visitor had given her; "but we did not expect you so soon, so you will have to put up with things as you find them."

"Say no more about that, Mary; I know everything's as nice and cozy as it can be, for all your apologising. Here Jem, Will, or what's your name?—just help me with these boxes; that's a good fellow!"

The person so addressed was standing near the gate, looking shyly but attentively on the proceedings of the two young people at the door. His uncouth dress probably induced George Watson to imagine he was some hanger-on or dependent at the "Hillock," and that he was only waiting the commands of his young mistress to engage in any little service she might require of him. But why in such livery? Why wear a white apron—why have his arms stuck through a pair of footless stockings? Surely such habiliments are ill-assorted with the duties of a farmstead!

Reach down that trunk, Harry Andrew! Eyes

are watching thee with more interest than thou mayest think. Receive your guest, Aaron Hartley ! Send thy messages of charity, incomparable woman ! Thy messenger shall speed like Mercury upon his errand ; and when thou art least thinking of the good thou hast done, prayers shall be sent up for thy happiness, which the Great God above shall hear, and store up against the trials which thy after life may bring thee. But a "Merry Christmas" is coming. The sun twice round and it is here. The bells have proclaimed it. Its voice hath come over the mountain tops, and its smiles dwell in the genial sunshine. Trim the mistletoe ; weave the holly ; pile up the fire ;—and, when the wassail-cup is filled, drink to Aaron Hartley ; drink to his lovely daughter ; drink to their youthful guest ; drink to all the household ; and ere yet the bowl be drained—ere the dregs are seen—fill up a measure, and drink to "THE LAYROCK OF LANGLEY-SIDE !"

CHAPTER III.

ON the morning of the 25th, when Langley-side was preparing for its festivities, Aaron Hartley and his guest were seated in the little parlour at the "Hillock." They had just breakfasted, and were wiling away the forenoon after the fashion which accorded most with their own individual dispositions at the time. Aaron occupied himself with rough calculations as to the probable cost of the dinner at the "Pig and Fork;" not that he was afraid of the expense, but it was a sort of pastime to him, going over the various items as they suggested themselves to his calculating mind. George Watson was differently employed. He had taken up a book to read, but had laid it down again, after glancing carelessly over a few pages. It happened to be "Pilgrim's Progress," Miss Hartley's favourite book at all times, and which George found lying next to him on the little sideboard. He, however, cared not for the society of "Christian" just then; preferring to look on the bright, living prospect before him, to journeying through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death." So he threw himself on the sofa; lighted a cigar, and alternately watching the smoke curl about the window-curtains, and turning to look out upon the snow, he felt the forenoon gliding over

so pleasantly, that he wondered if country life would always be so agreeable. How beautifully the village nestled itself on the opposite slope; now showing itself more and more definitely as the sun mounted towards its meridian, and lighted up the chinks and hollows of the mountains beyond! The comb of pines fringing the prospect southwards; the little farmsteads dotting the western slope, and surrounded by meadows, which, when dressed in their summer green, must form as pretty a landscape as an eye accustomed only to town sights would wish to behold. And the snug paradise of the "Hillock," which he felt to be a home so suggestive of home-feeling, that, looking back upon the past, he fancied his youth had been spent upon an unquiet sea, and that his storm-beaten soul, which he felt to be growing sentimental, had been cast thither to find a haven and a resting place.

While George was thus engaged musing on the past, looking out upon the present, and indulging in bright hopes for the future, Aaron Hartley looked up from his calculations, and showed a desire to engage in conversation.

"I find," said he, "after reckoning the quantity and price of everything required for the dinner up yonder, that, with your very handsome subscription, George, we shall be enabled to treat the old women to a *tea-and-rum baggin'* in the evening."

"With all my heart, if you wish it," replied his friend. "But what kind of an affair is a '*tea-and-rum baggin'*,' as you call it?"

"Well," replied Mr. Hartley, smiling, "it is simply a tea with a little drop of rum poured into each cup—so little as to be quite harmless to those who partake."

"Do you think, Mr. Hartley, there would be no impropriety in such a course? I never heard of the like before, and to me it appears so nearly akin to the indiscreet that I must, or rather, I should like to see it in a more favourable light before consenting to the proposal."

"You talk like a sage, George; and I do not wonder at your qualms. You have seen gin-palaces, where men and women take dram after dram daily, and yet would stare if we were to call them drunkards. I doubt not that you have seen them reeling besotted homewards, and from such experiences have condemned everything connected with drinking as beastly and immoral. Well, George, far be it from my wish to disturb a wholesome prejudice against drink; at the same time, I think it may be borne too far."

"Mr. Hartley," said George, flinging the remnant of his cigar into the fire, as though its further contact with his lips would be contagious, "I have beheld sights in Liverpool that have appalled me. I have seen mothers strip their children almost naked to pawn their rags for drink. I have known wives sell their virtue—ruin home—everything about them, for the sake of the accursed dram. I trust you have none such people in your village."

"Nothing of the kind, George, I assure you."

"Nor those detestable gin-shops?"

“Bless your heart, no,” replied Mr. Hartley; “what could we do with them if we had? We have only one public-house in all Langley-side, and that is the ‘Pig and Fork;’ and I doubt if all the spirits in the cellar would make one of your seasoned townspeople drunk. I have known ‘Old Tachin,’ the cobbler—who is, perhaps, the most noted tippler we have about here—go in on a Monday morning, and after pretending to fuddle all day, go home at night and sole a pair of shoes. There are plenty of our people who would make merry over a jug of ale, or a cup of tea-and-rum at Christmas, and perhaps taste nothing stronger than the tea itself until the following Christmas. It is an institution hereabouts that may be ranked with our merry meals, our christenings and weddings. A stout potato-pie and a jug of home-brewed to dinner, and a tea-and-rum baggin’ on a Christmas Day, are customs as sacred to Langley-side as Lord Mayor’s Day and Boxing-night are to the metropolis.”

George Watson felt his prejudices giving way, and he expressed himself willing to trust to his old friend’s guidance in such matters. Villages, perhaps, were not so immoral as towns, and people there might enjoy themselves without going to excess. Few people, he thought, took drink immoderately because they actually liked it. It was society, and the corrupting influences which netted it over like so many snares, that induced drunkenness. And we should go on, and on, and on—demanding stronger stimulants as our anxieties became keener, until the apothecary

would be a large sharer of the patronage now bestowed on the publican. These reflections got him over his scruples, and reconciled him to the tea-and-rum party at once.

Miss Hartley now came into the room. She had been out with the school singers in the early morning, and had since laid down for an hour or two's repose. She looked fresh and cheerful as she entered, and took her seat beside her young friend with as sweet an expression on her face, the latter thought, as the most ardent lover would wish to be greeted with. Still he could not help observing that a shade of sadness would now and then chase away the smile, as if some blighting wind had swept over it; and she would gaze anxiously out of the window, as if expecting visitors who did not make their appearance, and without her being able to fashion an excuse for their absence

"I understand you were a truant last night, Mary," observed George, in an attempt to break the frigidness which seemed to divide them as with a bar. "You might have told me of your intended excursion, and I would most gladly have accompanied you. If I couldn't have sung, I could have carried the lantern, or held my hat for the coppers."

"Oh, George!" said Miss Hartley, "how could a gentleman like you think of getting out of bed at midnight, and tramping through the cold snow with a lot of poor people like ours, singing and begging for Christmas offerings?"

"Surely, Mary, I am as fit for such rough business as you are. Beside, how could you think of leaving home at such a time without anyone to protect you?"

"I never feel that I require protection," replied Miss Hartley. "There are no bad people about here that I know, and what else ought we to be afraid of?"

"Ghosts and hobgoblins go about on Christmas Eve, I have heard my old housekeeper say; and I feel sure I heard something of the sort flitting about as I lay awake in bed."

"But at such a hallowed time as this they are reputed to be harmless, so what had I to fear from them?"

"Tut, tut! George,—you do not believe in all the nonsense about ghosts and boggarts, do you? Why, you're worse than a schoolboy." And Mr. Hartley laughed, as though he would chase away every belief that the timid held in the supernatural. "Come, my lad," he said, "the day's getting on. I shall be wanted in the village; and, if you don't mind taking an airing, we will just go as far as the 'Pig and Fork to see how the dinner is progressing. I have no doubt Polly can spare us; eh, lass?"

Mary might not have heard what her father said, for she returned no answer, but sat with her eyes fixed on the opposite hill-side, watching every object that moved about it, but seeming to get no satisfaction from her observations.

Mr. Hartley and his guest prepared for their walk. The latter had not been in the village since he was a

little boy, and he felt quite an eagerness to renew acquaintance with old and scarcely remembered things. Still he would object to go unless Mr. Hartley promised that he would say nothing about his subscription towards defraying the expenses of the forthcoming festivities. That promise was readily given; and the two, after muffling themselves up in their great coats, were soon descending the path leading to the village.

It was an easy distance, and there were slides on the way—slides that glittered in the sunshine, and others that were treacherously hidden beneath a thin covering of snow, the work of some mischievous boys who loved to see cautious-looking people make half summersaults by slipping down them. And a very battlefield of snowballs lay scattered about, showing that a severe contest had taken place before the frost set in and spoilt the snow. And rudely-built towers were reared here and there, with archways cut through them, and whose bruised and shapeless sides bore marks of assailing clogs, that had been employed to storm them as so many strongholds. George Watson saw in those scenes familiar to youth some reminiscences of his early boyhood. There was the field in which he had played at football when scarcely big enough to kick it from the ground; there was the pond on which he had skated, with such tiny skates, he remembered, that, looking back to the time, they had only the appearance of toys. And now they came to a stile that he was sure he had romped about. He could remember the crooked rails, the peeled stumps, the

gate, drooping from its "angles," upon which he had swung, or dreamt he had swung for hours. And the church, too, peeping with a sort of ancient coquetry over the knoll there; he was sure he had seen that before. He had watched the rooks wheel round it on summer evenings. He could faintly remember, as if it were the echo of some sweet melody, the chimes and the hour striking that were to send him home; when little Mary would cling round his neck, and he would feel a childish love for her, that made her a little spirit, flitting through his memory during all those after years. He must have seen those old cottages, too, with quaintly laddered hen-roosts behind them; and those little, boxy, bowering summer-houses about, that were now very skeletons, peeping out of the snow with chill aspect, and seeming to say,— "wait till the foliage comes and the roses blow, and you will be glad to come to our shelter from the sun." He remembered, now, having gathered feathers there to make sails for his toy-boat, which he floated in the river; and which was a forbidden pastime, for he was sure to have a ducking at one time or another. And now old associations began to come in crowds upon his memory, and he felt what a delightful thing it would be to turn back in life and live his childhood over again. The very turn of the lane was familiar,— the bridge, there, with its one rail only still, and which he remembered having tumbled from it into the river, through his eagerness in pulling out an imaginary fish with his hempen line and pin-hook. He must have

known some of the faces he met, but they were older by many years than they were when he saw them before, and he could not then make out why time had made such changes for the worse, for everything seemed to have grown aged in a day, and was stalking rapidly to decay. Oh, never, he thought, visit old scenes in winter, if you remember them only in their summer time, unless the sun be shining and the bells ringing as they are now. It is like visiting a churchyard where the stones are growing gray, and the mosses are creeping over names that you remember as associated with youth and loveliness, as if hoary locks were mingling with the flowers with which we deck the brow of childhood, or falling upon the cradle-pillow in its rosy slumber.

Mine host at the "Pig and Fork" was busying himself amongst cooking utensils as Mr. Hartley and George Watson entered his establishment; so the two gentlemen were ushered into the bar-parlour, where a good fire was making merry with itself for want of better company. "Owd Daf," as boniface was mostly called in place of his proper and patriarchal name of "David," promised to join them in a "two-thri" minutes, or as soon as he had "sattlet" a certain "brid," meaning a turkey, which was making Christmas music in the oven.

"Well, Aaron," he said, as, with a face very much akin to the kitchen fire, he entered the room, "we'st ha' rare spooart to-day! The parson's gooin' t' come a cuttin' up for us. He's as good a nose at th' neigh-

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hole of a kitchen dur, an' can play as good a stick at th' gable end of a reawnd o' beef as mooast o' folk. Come, have a swipple o' brandy wi' mi; an' that young gentleman too. He looks a farrantly sort of a chap, at ony rate. Is he come a-peeweeatin' at yo're Mary? Ay, whorr, Aaron?" and Daf winked at both of his guests in turn, and laughed, as though he had made an important discovery, and was congratulating himself upon it.

Mr. Hartley smiled; George Watson blushed; and further allusion to so delicate a subject as the one the landlord had broached was prevented by the three glasses of brandy being brought in.

"Well, here's a Happy New Ye'r, when it comes," said Daf, taking up his tumbler and emptying it at one gulp, as if it had been a dose of medicine which it was desirable should be swallowed as speedily as possible. "We'st have a hungry lot to-day, Aaron," he continued, "th' tap reawm's full neaw, an' there isno' one on 'em ut's had a gradely dinner sin' th' last Kesmus; so yo' may expect as good a senglet-tightenin' as ever yo' se'ed. Joe o' Dicks wur here afore we'd cleecant up; an' we had t' mop a flag for him t' sit on. He's yonder neaw, makkin knives an' forks of his fingers, an' purtendin' t' thwite away same as if he'd a lump o' beef afore him. Ay, yo' may stare, young mon; bo yo'n see sich a plate dressin' as yo' ne'er expectut, if yo' tarryn to th' dinner. Owd Joe ud shift a bakin-day anytoime, if they'd let him have his fill."

"Call him in," said Mr. Hartley, laughing. "He used to be one of my father's best weavers, but he's got too old now for particular work ; so I help him out a little in consideration of long servitude. You will be delighted with this oddity, George. He's a thorough specimen of a Lancashire weaver—a class of people of whom the world beyond our county boundaries knows nothing ; and yet many of them have fought life's battle as proudly and as nobly as most of artisans ; and though they have suffered privations beyond telling, they have borne them patiently, and without obtruding them on their neighbours or society at large. Here he comes."

A heavily shod stick was now heard clanking in the lobby, the noise of which was accompanied by the barking of an asthmatical cough, and the stamping of a pair of clogs that sounded much too large for his feet ; and presently the face of the new-comer was seen peering in at the parlour door.

"Come in !" sang out Aaron.

"Come in !" said George Watson.

"Well, well, Mesther Hartley ? Heigh, heigh, heigh—God bless yo ! Heaw are yo ?" said the visitor, shaking his bare and rugged throat with a strange laugh.

"Middling, middling, Joseph," replied Aaron ; "come, sit down."

"What ! upo' theese cheears ?" and the old man appeared to regard the finely-cushioned chairs as things more for ornament than use. "Aw've livt i'

Langley-side these three an' seventy yer, an' aw dunna know ut aw're ever i' this reawm before. What grandery!—picthurs, an' lookin'-glasses, an' pot dolls, an'—dear me! heigh, heigh! What, is this young felly your new partner?" he inquired, giving George a nod, as if he desired further acquaintance with that gentleman.

"A friend of mine only," replied Mr. Hartley. "Come, what will you take?"

"Well, well," said Joe, "aw've never bin use't to dhrinkin' nowt strunger nor barrel-tears; so aw'd as lief have a gill as owt. If yo'd mak' it int' a pint, aw could ax yo' t' sup wi' me."

A pint was ordered and brought in, and directly the hind brim of Joe's hat was dipping into his nape, and the sinews of his throat were vibrating like a group of traddle-cords in motion, as he gulped down the frothy liquid.

"Aw've carried monny a looad o' this fro' th' *Split-Bacon** of a Setherday neet; ha' not aw, Aaron? Well, one owt have a bit of a swillin' eawt neaw an' agen, same as they dun a ale barrel; or one's inside ud be gettin' meawlt."

"Do you mean that you should get drunk so often?" inquired George, who began to think they had caught a queer fish.

"Dhrunken? Eh, nawe, lad. This ud naw mak'

* A long name given to the "Pig and Fork," the signboard of which was seen from the fore-quarters of the

nob'dy dhrunken; not it. They met give it to a new-born babby, an' teem it deawn it throat as fast as a tun-dish ud tak' it, an' th' chilt ud ail nowt, beawt it ud th' bally-wartch (bellyache). Whorr? Heigh, heigh-dear!" and he slapped his knees, and made loud thumps with his clogs upon the floor.

"You asked me just now if this young gentleman was my new partner," said Mr. Hartley. "What did you mean by it?"

"Meean?" echoed Joe; "wheay they sen ut yo're gooin' t' ha' one."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Aaron.

"Ay, they'rn tellin' up at Smo-beeart's t'other neet ut yor'n gooin' t' have a partner; an' wayvin ud mend as soon as th' yer wur turnt."

"Well, somebody knows more than I do," observed Mr. Hartley; and a look of perplexity seemed to cross his face. "If they'd said that I intended giving up business altogether, they would have been nearer the truth."

"What, yo' give up, an' leeave us at the' ma'cy o' yon prow't up i' Birchwood? Nay, nay; aw winno believe it, aw winno believe it."

"But I have already determined on giving up," said Mr. Hartley. "Business has been a loss to me these two years."

"Aw'd rayther yo'd awter yor mind; that aw would," observed old Joe, putting on a look of very grave concern. "Aw conno' wayve same as aw're use't aw could, or aw'd ha woven for yo', neet an' day

for just a bit o' mayte, rayther than yo' should ha' gan up. Whatever mun folk do neaw, aw wondher? Yon varment 'll flee us wick neaw they'n gotten it to thersels. It's a pity they'rn ever put o' ther feet agen when they'rn brokken deawn; for they'n thried t' ruinate everybody sin' they startut; they han." And the speaker seized his pot, and swallowed as if wreaking vengeance on the parties he was alluding to.

"They'll be obliged to pay a better price for their work when trade revives," observed Mr. Hartley.

"They'n do nowt o'th sort, one *on* 'em 'll say he'll give mooar if th' t'other will; bo noather *on* 'em 'll mak' th' fust start. An' that's th' plan they'n carried on for a lung while. Bo they're aulus ready t' 'bate (reduce) whenever ther's t' leeast chance. Eawr Sam's woven to Sloper till welly o'th' buttons han flown off his breeches, an' he could no mak' spoon-mayte wi' o' ut he could do. Well, he went an' geet a reed o' 'Chep-trip' to Whiffle; an' when he'd borne whoam a week's wark, an' paid for th' windin', he had no' as mich brass laft as ud raise a bakin'; say nowt abeawt th' candles he'd brunt. What dun yo' think o' that, neaw; what dun yo' think o' that?"

"It seems incredible," exclaimed George Watson.

"I'm afraid its too true," observed Mr. Hartley.

"It remains to be told how that class of people have worked and suffered, yet have never whispered their complaints beyond their own threshold. I am well acquainted with their condition, and I am sure that if I do not wash my hands of badness altogether, its

exigencies will drive me into the practice of a system against which my feelings revolt."

Old Joe leaned his hands upon his stick ; shook his head, and uttered a low moan. "Aaron," he said, "when yor'n a little curly-yedut lad, abeawt th' height o' this stick, awre use't mak' straw dragons* for yo', an' fly 'em o'er Langley-side. That wur when aw'd bin waitin' at th' wareheawse. Yor'n as bonny a little chelloper as ever a moather had need t' be preawd on. Yo' use't wear white bishops, an' shoon wi' little silver buckles ; an' when aw'd seen yo' runnin' deawn th' broo-side, aw could ha' catcht yo' i' mi-arms, an' felt as if yo'd bin my own. Aw said then ut if ever yo' livt t' be a mon wi should have as good a mesthur as ever yor feyther wur ; an' God knows a betther heartut felly never broke bread. Has nor it comn throe? Young mon, yo' happen know summut abeawt it. Ther's a dozen or two rough-spun dogs i' th' tap reawm neaw, ut if aw wur t' tell 'em what yo'n towld me, they'd skrike like new beytten childer. Aaron, yo' munno' give o'er yet ; yo' munno' give o'er yet." And the old man smote the floor with his stick, and pulled his hat over his eyes, as if such actions were intended to prevent his feelings carrying him further, or as a protest against Mr. Hartley's giving up business.

The worthy manufacturer could not help feeling moved at these touching reminiscences of his child-

* Kites made with straw frames.

hood, so unexpectedly introduced by old Joe. The appeal they conveyed smote his heart, and if the weaver had seen the tear which started into his eye, he would have felt that one half of his victory had been gained. Neither in speech nor in bearing could Aaron conceal the regret he felt at the course he had determined to pursue with respect to his business, but his face brightened up when his reflections suggested that, come what would, he could afford to make a few "reeds" of work, even at a trifling loss, to keep his oldest servants out of the Workhouse. Good, kind-hearted Aaron! The Samaritan was ever in thy breast, waiting to pour balm on thy brother's wounds, and fill the house of sorrow with rejoicing.

The commotion in the stairs, which sounded like the stumbling of a troop of horsemen, and the entrance of the landlord with the announcement that dinner was ready, cut short the conversation at this period, and the three betook themselves at once to the scene of festivity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE room in which the dinner was to be served up was an old-fashioned one—long and narrow, as though it had been constructed purposely to bring the company as close together as possible ; for, a person sitting on one side might shake hands with a friend on the other without the necessity of his taking more than two or three steps from his seat. It was low overhead—so low that when the company were smoking there was a fog in the middle that effectually screened one end from the other. But nearly everyone smoked who frequented the house, so that the accumulated fumes were never regarded as a source of annoyance. Two lovely fires blinked at a saucy distance from each other, as if they each claimed the right to warm one end of the room independent of the other's help. The floor was strewn with a mixture of sand and sawdust, that left footmarks wherever trod upon, and the forms or benches had been scoured and washed so clean as to resemble very narrow kitchen tables. And what pretty devices were formed out of evergreens ! Flat-backed tin candlesticks, bowering in very groves of holly ; boughs branching out from corners that birds might have hopped and perched in, and made quite a summer day of that genial

Christmas time. The windows were little forests, every lead in them being made a miniature hedgerow of, and forming twinkling squares, through which the red winter's sun poured its cold but welcome light. Then the table with covers for thirty! The cloth quite a rush-cart sheet of bright knives, forks, spoons, and crockery; old-fashioned china "butter-boats," squat pickle-pots, golden-windowed castle turrets enclosing sheaves of crisp-looking celery, and piles of plates that were so hot nobody durst touch them. And then the smoke at each end of the table! The round of beef that the majority fixed their eyes upon, the turkey that a few glanced at with looks of epicurean pleasure, and the jolly face of the rector, that to look at, was as good as a feast at any time. What a picture!

"How do you do, Mr. Hartley?" said the reverend gentleman, brushing into the room, and seeming to dispense as much heat about his person as would a shovelful of live coals. "A Merry Christmas to you, and a Happy New Year when it comes!"

"The same to you, Mr. Goodear," responded Mr. Hartley; and the two gentlemen shook hands so warmly that another shovelful of live coals might have been brought into the room.

"Aw reckon yo're o' here," observed his reverence, taking his place at the beef end of the table, and drawing the carving-knife briskly over the steel.

"Ay, an han bin above an heawr," replied a raw-boned, hungry-looking fellow, without taking his eyes off the beef.

"Well, then, draw up," said the rector, burying his knife into the little volcano, and bringing out a stream of red gravy.

Immediately there was a movement towards the table from each side of the room, as though the guests were performing some kind of a dance in which they had to meet partners in the middle; and the clatter of clogs as they stumbled against the forms was as if some dozen were engaged in "shuffling off" a clog hornpipe. The group, as they assembled round the table, was such as only the most primitive nooks of Lancashire could have furnished. They were hardy-looking, rugged-mannered old men, who had been tossed on life's tempest and braved it; whose faces were furrowed like their hill-sides, down which the torrents of thousands of winters had poured; their hair the very grey moss looking out amongst the verdure of fresher life, like the mountain's beard amongst the green meadows around it. Despite the privations which most of them had endured, there seemed to be the glow of health upon every cheek, as if the air they breathed was food and drink to them; and the lungs with which some of the more hale rang out their admiration of the feast before them, showed that the wheels of their system (if the term may be applied) were not clogged by disease.

Aaron Hartley took his seat before the turkey, and George Watson sat on his right hand, more interested in the group around the table than in any of the viands that were spread before him.

"A little for you, George, I know," said Mr. Hartley. "I'm afraid we shall have it left all to ourselves, unless the rector joins us. Oh, I see he is looking this way. Yes, parson, a little off the breast, that's your favourite, I believe. I'll save it for you."

The rector smiled and nodded.

"Yo' liken yores weel done, dunno yo', Joe?" the latter said. (The rector was fond of using the vernacular when speaking to the more humble of his parishioners, and he was now addressing Old Joe o' Dick's, who had taken his place near him).

"Any sort," replied Joe, spreading a pocket handkerchief about the size of a doll's apron upon his knee.

"Well, get this clog-sole into yo' then," said the other, handing the weaver a lump of meat that looked like a small brick on his plate. "It's as nice a piece o' beef as ever greased a thwittle. Neaw, Sam, this 'll just tak that grin off thi face, if theaw'll nobt wait abit," said he to a fellow whose mouth appeared to be playing with itself for want of something better to do. "There, neaw; if theaw comes agen after that, theaw'll ha' to put it i' thi pocket, aw think."

"Mesthur Goodear," said a person on the other side of the table, "aw wish yo'd yor t'other peeper (the rector had only one eye) ut yo' could see this side a bit."

"Theaw's no 'casion t' be i' sich a hurry," said the old gentleman; "we'st o' start at once. Neaw, neaw, Joe, yo're natterin at it, aw see, afore au've axt a blessin."

"Aw nobbo just savvourt," said Joe, laying down his knife and fork. "Aw wish yo'd someb'dy t' help yo. Does nob'dy want no turkey, aw wondhur. Mesthur Hartley yonder favvers he'd o' his bobbins full, an' wur waitin' for empties."

"Fat for me, Mesthur Goadear," said the third down the form. And a plate was flung at the speaker, just to his liking; as might be gathered from the expansion of his eyes as he looked at it.

"Some just breawnt through for me," said a fourth.

"Any sort ut'll come, uppo' bo oan," said a fifth, and the round of beef grew less and less; and plates went down one side, and then down the other, and sly tastings were smuggled, and encomiums whispered, and expressions of longing uttered, until the last man was being served.

"Aw wish he'd be sharp an say grace," remarked Joe o' Dick's elbow neighbour; "my cubburt's yammerin wurr nor a kennel o' dogs at a Sunday dinner."

The rector, laying down his knife and fork, spread his handkerchief before his face a moment, and the next there was a clatter round the table that told of the business having begun in earnest. Potatoes were rolling about, as though they were animated, and were intent upon dancing a Christmas round. Little squares of bread were being pitched on every hand, and hard oat-cake was being crunched with a delightful relish by those whose teeth were little worse than their appetites. Some, in their clumsiness, spilled their gravy, and looked with consternation on the

besmeared table-cloth ; others fought with their victuals until their plates were nearly slipping off the table—working with their knives and forks, which they called “tools,” until the hafts were all but hidden up their sleeves. All were busy—busy as they could be ; and the rector, as he contemplated the scene through the smoke which rose before him, smiled with a beneficent smile at Mr. Hartley, and clasped his hands with a thankful and approving expression, and took his turkey gently, in small particles, that did not look like eating when compared with the work that was going on round the table.

“Win yo’ have ale or wayther, Joe?” asked the landlord, bustling round the table with a gallon jug in his hand.

“Con aw have which aw’ve a mind ?” said Joe.

“Ay !”

“Well, then, do as theaw’d be done by, an’ teem a sope o’ thoose barrel-tears i’ this glass, an’ aw’ll ha’ th’ wayther sometime else. Mesthur Goodear, *come !*”

“*Do !*” responded the rector ; and they each bolted a small tumbler of ale.

“Theaw’s put mooar maut i’ this nor theaw uses doin’. Whorr, Daf?” said Joe, winking at his neighbours.

“Ay, Mesther Hartley ordert it brewed o’ purpose,” said the landlord.

“Aw thowt so,” said the other, “for it warms one’s inside like a little bonfoyer,” and he fell to at his plate

again, but with a perceptible slackening of appetite, as though the "clog-sole" of beef was getting the master of him.

"Aw've a little bit of a corner for some o' that brid, Mesthur Hartley," said "Lung Yeb," standing upright at the table, and holding out his plate; "abeawt a leg 'll do."

"Pass your plate and you shall have it," said Mr. Hartley. "Any of the forcemeat?"

"Whorr?"

"Any of the stuffing?"

"Oh, well, ay; aw aulus like't th' yarbs. You may gie mi abeawt a hawve a spoontle. Theer, that 'll do," and the old hunter squared his elbows for work; previously bottoming a glass of ale, "to sattel th' tother deawn," as he remarked.

"It'll noa freeze mich wheer theau art' neet, Yeb," said a looker-on, who had already crossed his knife and fork.

"Owd thi noyse, Sam," said Yeb; "aw'm layin' in a stock for th' next week, mon. It'll ha' t' be very thin porritch after this, aw con tell thi', an' mⁱ stomach 'll be too preawd for 'em for a while; so aw'm makkin' hay while th' sun shines."

"Well, bo ther's some puddin' t' come yet."

"Ler it come; aw'st noa sit on it. It's nobbo same as puttin' a tabbin in, mon, aytin a bit o' dumplin.' Dost think it'll come in i' thunner and leetenin?"

"Heaw's that?"

"Lapt up i' blue blazes. Owd Spuddle ud his

eebrees (eyebrows) sweett off wi' some once't, when they'r havin' a haymakkin supper at th' Ho; he're i' sich a hurry t' get howd o' some mooar. Hallo! here it is," he exclaimed, as the landlady entered with the pudding, "tumblin' i' pieces like a limestone in a sheaver. If that does no' mak' somb'dy's clooas too little for 'em aw'll never stir agean."

"Theaw'll have hard work *for* t' stir e'neaw," said a person opposite, who had been watching Yeb for some time. "Theaw's etten mooar beef neaw nor Bill o' Butchers has in his shop, besides the crutch of a turkey. Theaw'll want windin' up, same as they did Smo'beeart when he tacklet a whul potato-pie at Owd Jonathan's rent-neet."

There was a good laugh at this remark by those who had left off eating; but Yeb's only indication that he regarded it as otherwise than complimentary was his uttering a solemn "Gullook!" by which he meant to stave off all further observation.

The course of plum-pudding was now served; each plate being garnished by a faint blue flame, which everybody admired, as if the company present had been so many fire-eaters. This course dispatched, other viands followed, until there began to be a perceptible drowsiness amongst the partakers, which told of a considerable falling off of appetite. At last thanks were offered by the rector; the table was cleared; yawning commenced at the top and went round—a sign that all had feasted heartily and were satisfied. Yawning went round again and again, and when Mr. Hartley proposed

that the rector should become chairman, and desired the company would remove to their former seats, where the wassail would be served, a loud snore mingled with the "Hear, hear," which followed. It was a snore—there could be no mistake about that; and some of the company tittered, Mr. Hartley and the rector smiled, until merriment became universal, when it was discovered that "Lung Yeb" was as soundly asleep as if he had been in bed—with a piece of pudding stuck on the end of his fork, which with his hand resting on his knee, he waved to and fro like a "picking-peg."

"Wakken up, Seawndher!" shouted Yeb's neighbour; giving the old hunter a shake.

"Heigh, ho, mi beauty!" exclaimed Yeb, opening his eyes wildly, and making a snap at the pudding, which he bolted without further ado. "Good mayte an' dhrink's best sleeping-stuff yet, if one could nobbo get plenty on't. Whorr, lads?"

"To be sure it is," replied the rector, rising, "except a bad sermon," at which there was a good deal of pleasant comment, seasoned with such observations as "th' parson's a trump," and "gcspel an' good dinners owt t' goo t'gether," &c.

"Neighbours and fellow - Christians," said the reverend gentleman, "I want to say something to you. I do not intend making a long speech. I merely want to talk with you *gradsly*, to feel with you, to sympathise with you, to gather you into one breast, as it were, so that the springs of our affections may flow together. This is a time when our grosser

life should be laid aside as a dry husk; when we should rejoice as the good shepherds did at Bethlehem when our Saviour was born to us. I trust you all are satisfied with the more substantial part of our business. (Here several stroked their hands down their waistcoats, as if to imply "yes" in the most emphatic manner possible.) I see by your demonstrations there is little room for complaint on that score. (A voice: "Nawe, nor for mayte noather.") Well, then, we ought to be thankful to God in the first place, and to our hospitable entertainer for the repast we have partaken of; and I trust you will give an expression to that feeling by drinking Mr. Hartley's health in a bumper of gratitude."

"An' that we will, if it's th' last dhrop i'th' barrel!" exclaimed Joe o' Dick's, making an effort to seize his glass.

"Stay a moment," said the rector; "our Queen the first."

"Ay, ay—reet, Mesthur Goodear; and "The Queen!" was tossed off in a draught of loyalty that made it necessary for the landlord to go round with the jug to replenish.

"Now then," said the reverend chairman, "Mr. Hartley! and coupling with the toast the health of his lovely daughter. May they both live so long as earthly happiness can last, and be gathered after death into the fold of the Good Shepherd, to dwell in everlasting bliss!"

"God bless 'em!" went round the table with a

simultaneousness that made the many exclamations appear as if uttered by one voice only. "God bless 'em!" was repeated, old Joe o' Dick's flinging a tear from his rough cheek, then opening his gills like a very scraggy fish for the reception of the toast. "Thoose ut hannot a thankful heart," said the weaver, after he had drunk, "owt t' ha' nowt for their share o' everythin', an' that ta'en away as soon as they'n gotten it. *That's my motty.*"

"Well done, Joe!" exclaimed several voices.

"Recat agen, owd lad."

"Here's toart thi," said Lung Yeb, making Joe into an excuse for taking another glass; "theaw's a bit o'th' owd soil abeawt thi' roots yet, owd mon."

Here there commenced a loud thumping on the table. Mr. Hartley was on his feet, and spreading his hands across the table as if he wished to take the whole company into his arms while he acknowledged the compliment they had paid him.

"My good friends," said the honest gentlemen, "if you are satisfied, I am. Thank you; thank you! I would have said more, only I feel that it would be out of place; for you know me, and if I were to speak all night we should not understand each other better than we do. But there is one thing I wish to name before I sit down, as I feel I should be easier by taking you into my confidence. I intend shortly to give up business."

Here there arose a tumult of voices, and the whole company were on their feet in a twinkling.

"Nay, nay, Mesthur Hartley, yo' munna."

"Yo'd betthur bury us o' wick at once't."

"Ther'll be nowt bo th' warkheawse for sich like as us."

"Tak' another thowt, Aaron ; tak' another thowt."

"You are too hasty with me," said Mr. Hartley.

"I intend making a little provision for my oldest weavers by continuing to put out a few coarse reeds. But this I shall have to do at a loss ; for I tell you that with the competition which has set in from a certain quarter, it is impossible for an *honest* man to make both ends meet. I have done well in my time, and I always felt that I had God's blessing with me when I lay down at night ; for I strove to do that which was right betwixt man and man in all my transactions. Well, you have helped to make me wealthy ; not very wealthy ; but I have sufficient for my own and family wants, and something over wherewith to help you. Bless you, bless you, neighbours. I have seen your faces grow old about me. They seem to be of my kindred, and I could as soon think of deserting my own child as turning my back upon you. I wish you a Merry Christmas."

There was not one eye dry during the delivery of the latter portion of Mr. Hartley's speech. The rector—good old soul—had his pocket handkerchief spread before his face, not this time to ask a blessing on the feast, but to conceal two little fountains that were irrigating his cheeks most plentifully. Joe o' Dick's was blubbering like a child, leaning his breast

on his knees, and throwing out first one hand, then the other, whilst making them do the duty of two pocket handkerchiefs. Even the iron-framed Lung Yeb was moved, and he sat bolt upright with his head thrown back, pulling his face into all manners of shapes in his efforts to "feel hard," as he afterwards expressed himself.

The applause which followed began almost in a whisper, as if everyone had forgotten that they should applaud. It grew louder rapidly, however, until quite a storm broke forth. And there was such a rush towards Mr. Hartley; such struggling to shake hands with him, that many made mistakes, and shook hands with each other. Then the wassail came in, steaming and emitting a glow from the bowl that dried up every tear; and if ever a winter's sun was brighter than the one which now set off the expression of joy that dwelt on each countenance, it ought to have stood still and lit up creation for ever.

And now the song broke forth, the songs that we do not hear often, and sung in a manner that these flimsily-constructed times know not how to appreciate—sung as if the singer was himself the poet, and wished to make his hearers feel all that the song expressed, instead of warbling little senseless notes that find no echo in the heart, and please only the empty ear. They sung of old loves, and trysting gates; of faithful hearts, and coy wooings down in moonlit walks; of affections that wandered not over the world to find a reciprocation, but flung themselves round some village maiden

to make a very dove nest of her future cottage home. All sung of love. It was their joy, their sorrow, their little dream of life up in that village there, where ambitious natures found no scope, and longing for riches never made home look other than that bright and happy home it always was when want intruded not.

And now came the time that the company were to make room for the old women, for Harry Andrew had been sent round the village to distribute the invitations to the "tea and rum baggin;"—all the old men being invited to come and share the merriment when the tea was over. In the meantime, they would have a friendly jug down stairs, and at the very particular request of George Watson, whom the wassail had mellowed a little, and who felt all the prejudice giving way that he had cherished towards heavy, lumbering country people, whose sole delight he fancied to be in mugs of beer and orgies of tap-room roysteriug. But now he felt—not more kindly, for he had always felt kindly towards all people, but nearer to those about him—as if the fustian jacket and little blue coat wrapt up a heart, and a conscience dwelt within those hard-looking and unkempt heads. He could take their hands and feel as though he could shake them off, for they were hands that held his own in so firm, yet so gentle a grip; and, though the smoke from their pipes was a little annoying to him, he would not have had one of them put out for fear of spoiling the harmony of that cozy circle which they formed.

George Watson, you will not make your home at Liverpool again. That is settled already. Your old friend Aaron—his more to you than lovely daughter, the little nest on the "Hillock," those quaint specimens of humanity around you—will win you from the insipid life you have recently been accustomed to lead,—of evening parties and morning calls amongst the dreary, heartless time-slayers, who lead a round of hum-drum existence, and gather *enaut* as the sluggish river gathers wreck. You shall familiarise yourself with the bright summers and crisp winters of Langley-side, scent the blossoms of its meadows and hedgerows, listen to the river tinkling below as you take your evening walks ; and, with Mary Hartley as your companion, what earthly bliss could match such a glorious hey-day of love and pleasure ?

CHAPTER V.

EVENING drew its misty curtains over Langley-side, and as the twilight unveiled the stars one by one and hid them again, so did the cottage windows twinkle and become momentarily obscured as the fog rose and fell while sweeping round the hill-side. The frost set in keenly. Raintubs and small pools had already "clock faces" on their surface ; and slides brightened up and made the half-link of moon into many ripleths of light as it travelled over them. The hoar spread over spouts, and stumps, and gates, filling the hedges where the snow had been shaken off, and tinfoiling windows where the warmth of the interior was not sufficient to repel it. People's breath formed little clouds of mist, making their mouths into so many steampipes, blowing off their superabundant vapour ; and the solitude which seemed to set in with night grew more intense on the naked brows and slopes around, from the silence which the presence of the snow-kingdom had imposed. But if you had passed some of the cottages, and peeped through the windows, you might have beheld scenes that would have made you forget it was winter time. Faces that were bright with health and sweetness peeping rosily between curtains of auburn hair, tresses of which were being held in

the mouth whilst others were being "done up" into curls or plaits, and making such pretty contortions at old-fashioned mirrors that the middle window pane would seem to contain a picture which even Titian might have envied. And the bright fire too, before which groups of children would be dancing—dancing not to music, but because they could not hold their little feet in subjection, but must caper as the heart prompted, whether the pin could be stuck in the frock or not, and perhaps in spite of the promised "smack" with which the mother would threaten to curb their jubilation.

They were lighting the candles then at the school, as might be seen by the increasing twinkles at the windows; spreading the white cloths upon the long tables, so long that the young eye could hardly compass their extent. That news had been brought into a neighbour's house by a little girl already dressed in a nice printed frock and muffled in a dainty cloak, that made her look a very "Little Red Riding Hood," and who was "gooin to thay a pieth abeawt robinth an' thparrowth bein' provided for by the Lord." Who cares now for the frock being properly fastened if they can only be allowed to leave the warm fireside and run out into the cold frosty night, and enter again where there is light and warmth cheering and glowing, and where merry voices are ringing, and light feet are tripping, and sweet smiles are being interchanged, as if the place was a fair, where happiness could be bought with the only tender current in that commonwealth of

childhood—love. Oh, the impatience one feels over dressing! Why cannot we be as the birds, that rise with the sun from their nests, wash themselves in dew, and in a moment are ready to join their voices in the song of praise and rejoicing that creation may be pouring over the world as it awakens from its nightly slumber?

Now, there are streams of little people crowding in at the school-door; girls eager to be performing those charming offices that none but girls do to each other; exchanging little confidences, and choosing for each other little sweethearts from amongst the jorum of white-pinafores and bashful gentry who suck their thumbs in corners, like very "silly old men" that they are; boys ready for an inside "marlook," now that it is too late to slide and play out of doors, and who would not care for the tea were it not attended by huge squares of currant-bread heaped up in formidable-looking stacks, that were very towers of tempting sweetness. And elder people came—lasses who could not look you in the face without blushing, and who took smaller ones in their arms and kissed them, and who laid aside coy loves of bonnets, and shawls that seemed unwilling to be folded other than round the wearers, disclosing thereby plump, round figures so suggestive of the dawn of womanhood, that it were no wonder some eyes followed them about wherever they went, and that looks told tales of hearts that were fresh in their morning of love. Ruddy-faced and short-haired youths came, whose clothes smelled of "heps" from

the old chests of drawers, and whose shirt fronts and collars, coarse as they were in texture, had never been hung from garret windows in narrow, smoke-infested alleys, but had been bleached into maiden whiteness on hedges over which swept the pure mountain breeze.

And now there was an eager dropping into seats round the tables; tea-urns were brought steaming from the kitchen, and placed at convenient distances from each other; teaspoons jingled in cups that were being placed in order, as if each was selecting a partner to perform some kind of dance upon the table. And what a chorus of cheerful voices, each singing its share of praise in thankful lisps, pervaded that humble schoolroom, until it was climaxed in a shout of joyous welcome as a young and beautiful lady entered amongst a swarm of little friends, who would take her hand and cling about her as though she had been mother to them all!

What can be the raptures of a reigning beauty, who sweeps the ball-room with clouds of muslin, and sniffs the odour of finely scented bouquets, presented by some empty-headed, shallow-hearted clothes-peg, dawdling in the lustre of her vermilioned smiles, to the feelings with which Mary Hartley joined that happy assembly, where she need not kill with glances to be adored, and where the favours she bestows are shared equally by all? God bless thee, woman!—were thy sex to take example from thee, even in the little graceful acts which thou thinkest nothing of, but which are chronicled in the calendar of goodly works that the “recording

angel" treasures up against the great day of reckoning, what a sainthood would their little world present in contrast with the intriguing, mischief-making swarm of pretty idlers whose vanity appears to be the one absorbing passion of their lives!

Now the "Christmas Hymn" goes pealing up to the roof—little voices joining in it—chirping up too soon betimes, and lasting out too long—impatient to be foremost in the hymn of praise, and loving to make tiny echoes at the close, as if childhood should be first and last in song as well as in the scheme of life. The hymn is finished—a short prayer follows, a blessing is asked—then out pops the ambrosial tea; round and round the cups and saucers are dancing; little fingers are making believe that they are scalded; little mouths are puckered, and little cheeks are swelled with blowing off the fragrant steam; and, if ever eyes twinkled as they do now, or feet made such pattering work amongst each other, or elbows were in such dangerous proximity with hot, lifted saucers; or, if ever there was such bubbling, and sippering, and munching going on anywhere else, who would not have gloried in being a witness of the scene?

Ere yet there is more than a scarcely perceptible falling off from the table, little rings have begun to whirl round and round; little feet, that have been kicking, are chasing each other as it is being proclaimed by a dozen voices that "Old Roger is dead and laid in his grave," or that a "Silly old man" is walking about and has not the courage to mate

himself to any of the forward old dames who challenge his wooing. And these rings are swelling and multiplying, until there is a perfect Bedlam of whirling and skipping "moppets," and quite a "Dutch medley" of screaming chants buzzing in the ear. And there are "Twos and threes," and "Hitch-hatch," going on among the elder ones, who laugh and shout, and chase each other into corners—then, after a struggle for a kiss, return blushing to their places. And these are dragging older people still into the ranks, who make an effort to be youthful, and find themselves possessed of more activity and sprightliness than they had previously imagined they were, until, at length, the scene becomes so animated, and the play so general, that there is not a single spectator in the whole room; but all are going thoroughly into the enjoyment, as if that night was the beginning of a new life, in which sorrow and care and poverty should not be known, but all go "merry as a marriage bell," until death put out the candles and took the revellers to their eternal home.

And now, reader, let us leave those young people tiring themselves into a humour for their repose, and take another peep into the long, low room at the "Pig and Fork." Tea is over there too, and the hum of voices is getting louder as the clatter of cups and saucers becomes suggestive of feasting, and there are visible preparations for merriment of a more active kind. One ancient dame is just saying to the landlady, "Th' owd fellies may come up neaw if they'n

behave thesels; ho' if Long Yeh says ewt to me abeawt warmin' up owd porritch,* same as he did last greawt-neet, aw'll give him a look; that aw will. Aw'll let him know he's abeawt ten yer owder nor me."

"Nay, nay, Mally; yo're above seventy, an' he's nobbo' seventy-two; that aw do know," said the landlady."

"Nowt o'th' sort. Aw're nobbo sixty when eawer felly dee'd, an' that's—heaw lung sin'?"

"Ten yer, Mally."

"Ten fiddlesticks! Theaw'll ha' mi an owd woman e'neaw."

"Yo're Ellen's close upo' fifty, yo' known, an' hoo're yore second chilt."

"Well, ay, to be sure hoo is," admitted old Mally. "Heaw time slips o'er! Never mind; there's monny a one here ut's owder nor me." Saying which, the old dame fettled about her cap, stretched down her apron and bedgown, and, sidling with an air of very antiquated coquetry towards a seat opposite the door, put on a look that undoubtedly was intended to scare all mankind from her presence.

Then was heard the tweedling and grunting of a fiddle coming from below. "Yer yo'!" exclaimed "Betty-o'er-th'-Lone;" "if yon' isno' Limpin' Ike wi' his box o' strengs comin'." And immediately about forty feet were doing the secret shuffle under the forms,

* *Warmin' up owd porritch*: Renewing old love.

accompanied by involuntary noddings and jerkings of the head and nervous twitchings of apron corners. The din of voices burst forth afresh ; the tea-things were hurried away in heaps, and before "Limpin' Ike" and his fiddle could stumble their way over the awkward landing in the staircase, petticoats were dipping in the sand and sawdust from a number of the more active dames improvising a sort of half-curtasying, half-dancing movement in the middle of the room. Then a merry-looking face, made brighter by its having been polished and bee's-waxed by good Christmas cheer, would peep in at the door, and an old pair of gaiters would be trying to look youthful by taking a few turns on an imaginary pivot beneath the chandelier. With an alternate twist and hop the fiddler laboured himself to his seat in one corner, and which, being elevated from the rest, caused his head to be hidden behind a bush of holly which projected from the wall ; so that when he was at work upon the cat-gut, little of his person could be seen beside a hand vibrating like a small wing about the highest button of his waistcoat.

Now would come a rather irregular stream of the harder sex, grinning and looking far from being the woe-begone people that the season had found them. Some retained their pipes, which they flourished about in a wand-like manner as they did a sort of preliminary lifting of the heel at the door. The married took their seats beside their dames, and the widowed sat anywhere, as they each could accommodate themselves

among the damsels whom nobody could lawfully claim. "Lung Yeb" dropped himself close to "Betty-o'er-th'-Lone," and Joe-o'-Dick's took up his coat-tails opposite "Mally-o'-Bobs'," and said,

"If theaw's a mind, wench, aw'll sit o'th' side *on* thi." At which Mally looked towards Lung Yeb, and said,

"Reet, Joe," with all the emphasis that her capscreen could add to the welcome.

"Theaw use't theaw could ha' doancet a bit, Mally," said Joe, spouting out a whiff of tobacco smoke that went nearly across the room.

"Well, just a little bit," replied Mally, in a manner which seemed to say, nobody short of Taglioni could match her, "Bo aw'm gettin' owd, neaw, theaw sees."

"Nowt o'th' sort," said the other, with a chuckle, "Theaw'd clog* agen yet if theaw'd a good bargain afore thi. Whorr?"

A shake of the head, and a pucker of the mouth, was the only answer to this question that Joe-o'-Dick's could elicit.

"Eh, aw remember thi bein' a swipper wench, Mally," said Joe. "Theaw'd an e'e i' thi yed ut ud ha' fotcht a duck off th' wayther, an' a leg ut favvert it ud bin spoke-shavet into a straight taper same as owd Donty porritch slice. Theaw threw up thi yed at everybody then, till yo're Bob coom an' put his

* *Clog agen*: Marry again.

foowt between th' dur an' th' dur-cheek, an' sed he shouldno' poo it back agean till he'd had some sort o' readiness fro' thi. Eh, Mally! aw recollect; aw're with him at th' time. We'd bin to a main-brew at owd Planker's i' Welbruck, an' aw darred him t' rap at yo're window when wern gooin' past. He're a straight lad, wur yo'r Bob."

"A hondsomer never stept o' shoe leather," said the old woman, fetching up a sigh, and casting her eyes towards the saw-dust.

"Aw use't t' think ther wurna a nicer couple i' o' Langley-side nor yor Bob an' thee."

"Eh, dear!" exclaimed Mally, with her eyes still on the floor.

"An' theaw carries age so weel," continued Joe; "ther's nob'dy neaw ut ud tak' thi' t' be close upo eighty,—is there?"

"Eighty, Joe, eighty;" exclaimed the old girl, with a toss of the head and a flutter of indignation on her cap screen. "Theaw doesno' think aw coom eawt o' Noah's flood, doesta?"

"Eh, nawe, Mally, what am aw thinkin' abeawt?" said Joe. "Aw're recknin' beawt mi slate. Theawrt noa monny above *fifty*, neaw aw come t' bethink mi. Theaw startut yunk, aw know."

"Ay, Joe, aw nobbo wore bishops when aw're wed."

"Heigh, heigh, just so, wench; bo, they'rn lung uns, too, Mally;" and Joe was seized with a fit of coughing. "Theaw sees, owd craythur, my ballis are gettin' done."

"Ay, be theaw'rt a betther mon yet nor *some* folk."

"Dost think so? Aw'm abeawt th' owdst mon i' this chamber, too."

"Well, theaw may be; bo theaw carries age weel, theaw knows."

"Heigh, heigh, heigh! sink thi, Mally, husht, or else aw'st be hutchin closer to thi e'neaw;" and Joe tapped Mally's apron string with his elbow, and gave her as sly a look as his old eyes could fashion.

"Ger eawt wi' thi, Joe!" and the would-be ooy dame directed her looks towards the tall raw-boned youth who was dividing his attention betwixt his pipe and Betty-o'er-th'-Lone.

"Let's see; Lung Yeb yonder, use't t' pertend t' potther afther thi abit; did nor he?" said Joe.

"Yi; bo he never geet nowt nobbo sauce for his comin, noather, aw con tell thi."

"Well, bo," said Joe, peevishly, "he reckons neaw ut he con hang his hat up at yo're heawse, onytime ut he's a mind."

"Does he? Let him come, un aw'll scande him eawt."

"Heigh, heigh, heigh!" laughed Joe; "we're likker t' be thinkin abeawt *us* coffins, ner tawkin a this road. Come, they're goein' t' have a doance, an', if theaw's a mind, aw'll just tak' thi' hont in a bit of a tussle, if these owd legs o' mine winno' mak a foo' on me;" and he sang—"Tidly-bump-iho, tidly-bump-iho," accompanying the refrain with a slow rattling of his clogs on the floor.

The fiddle-pegs, that were of that peculiarly obstinate and capricious character which usually defy the first score of attempts to adjust them, were now supposed to have had their proper allowance of screwing, as the bow was drawn more confidently across the combined bars of catgut, and allowed to chirp on one string, as if all the favourite notes belonged to that string. Then it would go squeaking up to the topmost note, and drop thence whole octaves at once, like tumbling down so many pairs of stairs, till it alighted on the lowest note, where it grunted itself into a humour for starting off with any-number-of-hand reel. Then away the dancers went, those who could get off, making the windows betray their age and infirmities by the number of loose squares that were performing castanet accompaniments. Most of the company, however, instead of flying from one end of the room to the other, preferred remaining where they had taken up a position, spinning on their pivot after the manner of automaton dancers that we sometimes see performing on the head of a barrel organ. Joe-o'-Dick's was hammering away at snatches of hornpipe, taking very long rests after each succession of steps, and making a greater demonstration with his elbows than with his feet, thereby conveying an impression to people at the other end of the room that he was quite as busy and as active as a harlequin in a pantomime. Mally-o'-Bob's found it difficult to humour her steady and almost motionless style of dancing—if dancing it could be called—to Joe's wayward and spasmodic performances; and the danger

to which her feet would have been exposed, had she allowed them to stray within reach of her partner's clogs, kept her drilling upon the floor at more than a respectful distance from him. Joe minded not this shyness, however, preferring to have plenty of room to being inconveniently mixed up with styles of dancing that might have interfered with the independence of his action; so, he watched nothing but his own feet, with which, and his "tidly-bump," he held the fiddle at such defiance as to call forth several dumb expostulations from the small wing under the holly. In contrast with this business was the performance of Lung Yeb, who was flinging his legs about as if they did not concern him in the least, but was allowing somebody else to work them with strings. Although Betty-o'er-th'-Lone was considered to be his partner at the commencement of the dance, Yeb appeared to be indifferent as to what might become of that lady, and evinced his non-partiality by catching hold of any old dame who chanced to be in his way. In this manner he took them all in succession, spun round the room, and then left them breathless and expostulant anywhere in the dance. After several abortive attempts to come foul of Joe-o'-Dick's, without appearing to do so intentionally, he at last delivered himself full broadside on that individual, just as he was lifting his elbows for perhaps a twentieth rendering of the same step, and sent him with a very ungraceful reel right into the window bottom. Joe there threw a look of

astonishment behind him, which was the more broadly expressed when on recovering himself he found his rival clasping Mally-o'-Bob's by the waist, and the two were skipping down the room like a couple of very antiquated grasshoppers at play.

"Well," thought Joe, "if that isn't a bit of a corker. Here aw've bin treddlin' away like an owd foo, thinkin' Yeb could no' ha' toucht Mally beawt strikin' foyer off hur tongue; an' neaw they're coodlin' an' shepsterin' t'gether same as two young foke ut wanten nowt i'th' woald bo' one another! Eh wimmen, yo're wurr no' th' weather, that yo' are!"

Whilst Joe was thus moralising on the capriciousness of the female heart, the fiddler gave that peculiar scrunch on his instrument which signifies the dance is concluded. The company dropped exhausted in their seats, and seemed to relish with characteristic avidity the wassail which was served round to them. Joe-o'-Dick's sidled over to where Betty-o'er-th'-Lone was sitting, and motioning in the direction of Lung Yeb and Mally-o'-Bob's, who were so busily engaged in conversation as not to notice anything that was passing, said—

"Seawer crabs are sweet when they con get howd on 'em—whorr, Betty?"

"Ay," said the other; "an' no brid's safe till its wings are cut."

"Nawe; whoa'd ha' thowt ut Lung Yeb could ha' flown same as he has done, or ut Mally-o'-Bob's ud ha' rubbed hur bill agen his afther he'd bin flusterin' abeawt thee o' neet?"

"Eh, dear ! Joe ; Yeb's no mooar to me nor yo' are. He's abeawt th' biggest owd foo' i' Langley-side ; for he's hankerin abeawt foke's windows an' durs same as a young lad, an' God knows he's one foowt i'th grave an' th' tother hardly eawt."

"What, art theaw becoin' him neaw ?" said Joe ; "yo're o' alike. Yo're as natthert as two tinkers o' one walk, when yo are no' havin' yor own road ; an' it does no' matther whether yo're twenty yer owd or eighty, if a chap looks crookt, or isno' makkin a bit o' trouble *on* yo', yo'd give him as mich tongue sauce an' nailpie as ud flee him wick. Bo come, Betty, theaw use't theaw could sing a nice sunk or two when theaw wove at eawer fokes. Does theaw recollect ony *on* em?"

"Eh, nawe, aw dunno think aw do. My singin' days are o'er," said Betty.

"Well, bo just thry a bit of a love sunk ; aw'm sure theaw's no' forgotten 'em o'."

Without more inviting, or even without calling for silence, or hinting her purpose other than by a nod at the fiddler, which induced that worthy to imitate the crowing of a cock on his instrument, Betty-o'er-th'-Lone wiped her mouth with the corner of her apron, and commenced a monotonous warbling of the following ditty :—

JOHNNY OVER THE SALT SEA.

It was down by yonder river side
Where cat-tails they do grow,
I met a pretty fair maid
With bosom white as snow,

I said, my pretty maiden fair,
My dearest love, said I,
Wilt thou be mine in sweet wedlock?
Come answer me properly.

She blushed and took from off her neck,
From off her neck she took,
A ribbon fair tied with a bow,
And then gave me a look.
She said, you see this ribbon fair,
This ribbon fair you see;
Oh, I prize it more than silver or gold,
For my true-love gave it me.

My Johnny's gone o'er the salt sea
On board of a man-of-war,
And letters I get every month
From my true-hearted tar.
Don't think that I would him deceive,
Who constant thus hath been;
But I said, my dear, I'll soon settle that.
Your Johnny I have seen.

She fainted straight into my arms
At the mention of Johnny's name;
Then said, oh tell me, is he still,
Oh, is he still the same?
I said he'd married a black-a-moor,
All in East India;
And he would never come to England more,
Across the wide salt sea.

This maiden then the ribbon took
All by that cat-tailed river,
And threw as far as she could throw
The keepsake of her lover;

She said, kind sir, your wife I'll be,
If you'll be true to me,
And I never will think of Johnny more,
All over the salt sea.

Betty had no sooner finished her song than another female candidate for lyrical honours presented herself in the person of Mally-o'-Bob's; but as Joe-o'-Dicks knew that her favourite song was "The Bloody Gardener," which was about three times the length of the preceding one, he observed that "it wurno' fair ut th' women should have o'th' singin' to thersels; an' he'd see if he could no' blow 'em one cawt—'Th' Little Drummer Boy,'"—proposing to do the drum accompaniment with his clogs. "Bo' th' fust," said he, "lemmi just tell yo' ut wee'n letten Mesthur Hartley an' his young felly goo away beawt givin' 'em a sheawt, or sayin' good neet."

The two gentlemen referred to had left thus early in the evening, in company with the rector, having engaged to take tea with his reverence at the Rectory, and they were not expected to return. This information had been communicated by the landlady to Old Joe during the time that Betty-o'er-th'-Lone was disposing of "Johnny o'er the Salt Sea," and Joe sought this opportunity of reminding his companions of the obligations they owed their entertainers.

"Come, Yeb," said Joe, addressing his tall neighbour, "just get thi trumpet ready. Theaw con give a hunter's sheawt yet, aw know."

"Ay, that aw con, Joe," said Lung Yeb, getting on

his feet, and placing his hand trumpet-wise to his mouth. "Neaw, chaps, just let's thry t' lift th' roof off wi' abeawt a hawve a dozen hurrahs for good owd Aaron Hartley."

"Ay, an' Mary, too!" said a score of voices.

"An' Mary, too; bless hur!" said Yeb. "Neaw, Joe, theaw'rt pooin' thi face o'ready, aw see; theaw con never do nowt beawt skrikin'."

"Bless 'em booath!" said Joe-o'-Dick's, tears rolling down his cheeks.

"God bless 'em o'!" was the company's response.

"Neaw, then, for th' sheawt!"

Lung Yeb put his hand to his mouth again, and just as he was in the act of drawing in his breath, preparatory to lifting the roof with his stentorian voice, the landlady rushed into the room, and, looking wildly about, exclaimed,—

"Oh, my God! whatever dun yo' think has hap-pent?"

Nobody could surmise; but all were more or less shocked by the landlady's manner.

"Somebody's brokken into th' 'Hillock,' an' stript th' place o' everythin' in it—silk, cotton, bobbins—everythin'."

"Yo' dunna say so, Susy!"

"It's too thrue; an mooar beside that, Harry Andrey's ta'en up for it."

"Eh, never! Susy."

"He's gone to th' lockups just neaw, an' his poor owd moather skrikin afther him."

It was as if a thunderbolt had dropped into the room, such was the consternation depicted in everybody's countenance. The "Hillock" robbed—Harry Andrew accused of the robbery! What were a crash of thunder, even in that deep winter time, or the shock of an earthquake, to such a catastrophe? No one knew what to say—what to do; all were dumb and motionless with amazement. The fiddler at length took himself down from his perch, and placed his instrument in its bag; instinctively gathering from the turn the proceedings were taking that it was all up with merriment for that night. Then the commotion began; old heads were being shaken at each other, and lamentations were uttered so loudly, and with such expressions of agony on behalf of some, that the Merry Christmas scene of a moment before was changed to one of the deepest sorrow. Mally-o-Bob's and Betty-o'er-th'-Lone forgot their differences, if they had any, and bewailed the general misfortune; and those who scarcely would have wept at a funeral, found it hard to restrain their tears when they reflected upon the calamity which had fallen upon the village. Nobody had felt how dear to them was Harry Andrew until then. He had dwelt like a spirit of joy over Langley-side; but so accustomed had the villagers been to his ministrations, that they had ceased to regard them as things marvellous or not to be looked for. Hence, Harry was to them no other than the light-hearted, good-natured young fellow whom everybody loved without thinking why they loved him. But now that he had fallen they were

stricken down with him. The angel had gone out of the house, and there was mourning over the light that had departed.

"If Christ ud comn deawn upo' th' yearth an' done it, aw shouldno' ha' bin mooar surprist!" exclaimed Joe-o'-Dick's, burying his face in one of his coat tails and sobbing aloud. "Bo aw conno' believe it. Aw'll goo an' see, heawever. If they'n lemme tawk to him aw know he'll tell me if he has done owt o'th' sort; an' if he says he hasno', o'th' Bible oaths ut wur ever sworn before Mesthur Goodear 'll never mak mi t' believe he has. Nawe, nawe, he's never done it; he's never done it!"

"Here, Joe, put eawer Daf's top-coat on," said the landlady, "for it's a cowl, misty neet, an' yo'n mak yor cough wurr—gooin' up yonder beawt summut t' put o'er yo'."

"Eh, bless thi, wench," said Joe, "I need nowt o'th' sort as a top-coat. Aw ha' no' bin ust to bein' lapt up same as a new-born babby o' th' days o' mi life. Beside, it would no' be reet for t' thry t' mak one's sel' as comfortable as a wot ha'stone, neaw yon poor lad's i'th' plight he's in. Nawe, nawe, aw'll goo beawt; so lemme come."

Joe reached down his hat, and drew it over his eyes; then, gathering up his clogs, and striking his stick upon the floor, he made clumsy haste downstairs, and was soon heard coughing his way up the lane.

The rest of the company put on their hats, and bonnets, and cloaks, and went down stairs. Many betook

themselves to the frost and the mist up Langley-side, to inquire further into the fate of Harry Andrew, and the circumstances connected with the robbery at the "Hillock." They found younger people running about from house to house, with an ominous expression in the very manner in which they trod the snow, and in the half-wailing tones in which they conversed with each other. Everything confirmed the truth of what the landlady at the "Pig and Fork" had told them ; and the circumstances even grew more serious as they pushed their inquiries. The moon had gone down ; and now fog and darkness and sorrow spread a pall over Langley-side, as if the night of doom had come, instead of its being the birthday of salvation.

CHAPTER VI.

IF the scene at the "Pig and Fork," on the announcement of the robbery, was distressing, there was one more deeply so at the lock-up. To the latter place, which was a portion of a dwelling-house inhabited by the only constable in the locality, Harry Andrew was led. The policeman did not drag him thither, as some policemen might have done, but walked quietly by his side, and even spoke kind words to him. He had known Harry long—had seen him often on his errands of charity; and had more than once wept at tales of distress told him by his wife when some unfortunate family had been turned out of doors by an inconsiderate landlord, and had sought shelter at the "Station."

As the party entered the house they found the officer's wife with her two children engaged in singing a "Christmas Carol," and their sweet voices—dying so prettily away—were in joyous contrast with the wail that broke forth from Widow Andrew, who was clinging to her son as though to part with him were to lose everything the world contained that was dear to her. A bright fire threw its cheerful light on the two sweet faces that were raised towards their mother's; and the white, shining wall; the spotless hearth on

which pussy sat beating time with her eyes to the music of the sputtering coals; the two pictures at the head of the house—"Christ Welcoming Little Children," and "The Entry into Jerusalem;"—the slanting looking-glass that threw another bright scene from its surface; made the place appear so far from what the uninitiated conceive of the interior of a police-station, that Harry Andrew forgot for the moment that he was a prisoner.

It was so rare an occurrence for anyone to be brought in custody there, that the mistress of the house uttered an exclamation of astonishment as the shining handcuffs caught her sight; and the two children sank frightened on the end of the fender, still clinging to their mother's knees.

"Whatever's up now, John?" asked the woman as her husband was endeavouring to close the door on the pressing crowd.

"A robbery," replied John. "Now, folks, do go home; you can do no good here," and the door was closed, and the lock was shot. "Now, my good woman, give over crying; all may be well."

This latter sentence was addressed to Widow Andrew, whom he kindly accommodated with a chair as he spoke.

"Will e' be weel?" sobbed the old woman. "If he gets no meoar nor he desarves it will, aw know. Bo bad folk may ha' summut t' do wi' it, an' then—oh my poor lad—theaw may goo to prison, or be transported; an' aw may never see thi agen."

The prisoner, who until now scarcely appeared to

comprehend the nature of his situation, here hung down his head, and was evidently struggling to conceal an emotion which was overpowering him.

"Moather," said the youth, "frettin' winno' mak' things betthur. If aw've done owt wrung aw'm willin' t' suffer for it; an' if aw ha'no done nowt wrung, noather New Bailey nor Botany Bay 'll mak' me t' feel aw have. Aw'st just be t' same as if aw'd bin at mi loom, if I know ut' yo' dunno' fret abeawt mi."

"Ther's a God theere, aw know, as weel as here," said the old woman; "an' if nob'dy blesses thi same as aw shall, it'll be becose they thinken theawrt a thief. Oh, Harry, theawrt no thief aw'm sure."

Just then there came a knock at the door. Not the gentlest of knocks, but one that shook the latch and bolts, as if produced by something heavier than a stick.

"Oppen th' dur!" shouted a hoarse voice outside.

It was old Joe-o'-Dicks; Harry knew him by his voice.

"Oppen th' dar an' lemmi in," said Joe again.

"I shall have to lock some of you up if you don't go away quietly," said the officer, going towards the door.

"Aw dunno' care for that," said Joe: "aw'st happen be as weel off here as awhoam; so lemmi come in. Aw've getten summut t' say to Harry Andrey; if it's him as yo'n getten howd on."

The manner in which old Joe's request was given conveyed its own appeal, and the door was opened.

"Eh, Harry, lad!" exclaimed the weaver as he entered, but the sight of the handcuffs made him pause; and he stood looking at them, and at the face of the prisoner, as if he could not make out any connection between them.

"Has theaw done it?" he at length said, knocking aside the chair that had been offered him, and leaning a tottering weight upon his stick as if he only wanted Harry's confession of his guilt to crush him completely. "Has theaw done it?"

"Nawe, he never has!" put in his mother.

"Aw dunno' know what aw've done," said the youth; "it's o' a dhreeam to me."

"If aw thowt," said the weaver, "ut ther' oather a mon, or a woman, or a lad, or a wench, i' o' Langley-side ut would nor ha' brokken ther' necks for t' ha' safet him, aw could ha' wisht ut th' next flood ud boyernt us o away, rags an' sticks an' lumber an' o' wi' us."

Harry had his face buried in his hands.

"Bo what can we do neaw?" continued Joe, "when he's th' wust witness agen hisselt? Ther'll be no chance; no chance, nobbo th' wust."

"If he pleads guilty," observed the constable, "it may not go so bad with him. His previous good character may go far towards mitigating the punishment awarded him. A few week's imprisonment may be all that he'll get. One thing in his favour will be, that none of the stolen property was found upon him."

"Nowt at o'?"

"Not a rap of anything."

"Harry, just bethink thisel," said the weaver, addressing the prisoner, "What wurt doin' theere?"

"Dunno ax mi that," said Harry; "it'll happen come eawt soon enoof."

"Harry," said old Joe, shaking his head reproachfully, "theaw's never bin browt up to this. Thi feyther wur as honest as a lookin'-glass. Aw'm sure if he knew what ud becomn o' thee, he'd turn him in his coffin; that he would. An' robbin' thoose ut's bin like a feyther an' gronfeyther to thi! If theaw could nor ha' kept thi fingers to thisel, why did t' no' goo an' rob somb'dy else—Whiffle's, or Sloper's; an', if they'd ha' letten mi, aw'd ha' gone to th' New Bailey i' thi' place; so ut theaw'd ha' ta'en to honest ways at afther. Bo neaw——"

"It's getting late," interrupted the constable, "and as it won't be of service to the young man, trying to get all out of him, I must beg of you to leave."

"Yo' could no' let him goo whom wi' his moather, an' lock me up in his place, could yo'?" asked old Joe.

"That I could not," said the officer.

"Then we're liket leecave him; bo if he'd nobbe just say ut he had no' done it, aw'd tell o Langley-side t' neet, an' they'd believe me."

"Done it! Done what?" exclaimed the prisoner, seeming to awaken as from a stupor.

"Robbed Mesthur Hartley," said Joe.

"What me? Robbed Mesthur Hartley? Never."

"Theaw hasno'?"

"Never!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the weaver; at the same time flourishing his stick to the imminent risk of damaging two or three heads near him. "Stick to that, lad; stick to that; an' if we dunno' find someb'dy else eawt for t' tak' thi place, owd Joe 'll do summut for t' keep thi company. Come, Ailse; theaw may sleep t' neet as if theaw'r rocket wi' fairies. It 'll come eawt as reet as a hank o' weft ut has no' bin stiffent, wi' owd Nelly-at-th'-Bottom windin it off choysily, as hoo does when hoo's tawkin abeawt boggarts. Good neet, Harry; an' keep thi nose toart th' thatch, an' thi pluck eawt o' thi clogs—*theaw has clogs on, aw see*; an' we'n wipe this eawt like an owd ale-score ut's nob'dy livin t' own it."

"Bless thi, Harry,—an' good neet!" said the mother.

"Good neet! moather."

"Are thoose two little brids yo'res?" inquired Old Joe of the constable, as he was preparing to depart. The question had reference to the two little girls, who had so far recovered from their fright as to make friendly advances to the prisoner; one of them admiring the bright handcuffs, which she said were "like dada's;" whilst the other looked up into Harry's face, as though she beheld an expression there kindred to the one which beamed from her own, and a bunch of curls that moment began to play about his elbow.

"They are mine," replied the officer, smiling.

"God bless 'em, then!" exclaimed the weaver.

"If that lad ud bin a thief they'd never ha' gone nee

him. Childer and dogs known as weel as a judge in his chear; for aw believe ut God O'Meety tells 'em what's reet and wrank, beawt 'em thinkin' thersels ut they known it. Bless yo'; my little moppets? A woult beawt childer ud be like a fielt beawt fleawrs, or a harstone beawt foyer. It ud aulus be winter. Neaw, Ailse, aw'll put thi cloak hood on thi yed, an' we'n be off."

Laying her hand on her son's arm, then touching it with her fingers, and afterwards pointing towards it as if she would have touched it again, but could not reach, the poor woman submitted to Old Joe's little offices, and the pair took their departure from the police station together.

Harry Andrew, left by his friends, and having kissed the two little girls (why was he permitted?) previous to their going to bed, and responded to their "good night" when they reached the top of the stairs, now began to realise the truth of his situation. Hitherto his mind had been feverish from the excitement and novelty of the scenes in which he had been so prominent an actor; but now his strange lodgings, the quiet of the night, the ominous-looking bracelets that encircled his wrists, brought about reflections that weighed down his spirits in spite of his unusually buoyant temperament. Was he really guilty of the crime imputed to him? Or was he the victim of a species of madness that had led him unconsciously into the commission of deeds at which his soul, in his moments of reason, would revolt?

Oh, Mary Hartley ! thou above all others whose name it would seem ought not to have been mentioned here, how much is thy beauty and goodness answerable for this young man's captivity ; captivity of body—captivity of soul ? Had he not heard thy voice mingling in hymn of welcome to the birth of our Redeemer on that auspicious and inauspicious morning, who knows but he would now have been sleeping soundly in his nest over the loom, instead of being the sleepless tenant of the village lock-up ? Sleepless ! not quite so, for he was wearied past watching.

Harry's bed was in a small room over what had once been a loom house. Next to this the children slept. He could hear their respirations. He had never listened to the breathing of childhood in its sleep before ; so innocent, so assuring ! And how it assumed the harmony of those voices he had heard that morning, when it came whispering up from the distance. With their soft breathing wrapping his soul as with a lullaby, the youth closed his eyes at last, and a sweet dream came over him.

The snow had departed, and it was summer time. The fields and woods were never fairer, nor more richly clothed. The brightest of suns and skies flooded the heavens with gold and azure, and the little brook-lets danced joyously down to the pools, lingered a moment there as if caressed by the nodding reeds and flowers that drooped over them, then danced and leaped and murmured onwards to the sea. He listened to the birds—how they sang ! but not as birds had sung

before. Their melody now was more like that of the human voice. Could they be angels? he wondered; for he had sometimes fancied when the air was still and warm, and he had thrown himself on a bank to indulge in reverie, that he could hear faint sounds that belonged not to earthly music. Yes, voices of angels were mingling; for two of them, assuming the forms of those who were sleeping near, approached him and strewed flowers on his coverlet, and his heart seemed to still its throbbings. He saw their sweet lips pouting, and redolent with childish kisses. He felt their little hands; their breath stole over his cheek like the fanning of the first breeze of summer. And what an angelic form bent over him, and gazed tenderly on his face, the very image of one nearest his heart, if it was not sacrilege to hold it there—of one he loved, yet dared not own he loved, lest his presumption should overthrow him. Why did she not frown a reproach upon him, unworthy that he was; why instead did she smile through “the rain of her tears” and whisper hope to him?

The vision faded. Slowly the fair forms receded from the dreamer's sight, until at last, mounting upon a cloud, they were borne by the cherubim heavenwards. Then the scene changed, and gates of iron frowned upon the sleeper. Manacles dangled where golden tresses had hung before; and instead of faces beaming with expressions of love and hope to cheer him, the grim warder of a prison stalked like an evil presence by his bedside.

CHAPTER VII.

EARLY on the morning of the 26th, Joe-o'-Dick's had swallowed his porridge breakfast, Joe loved his porridge, and regarded tea and toast with epicurean disdain. Even coffee was intolerable to him, unless composed of one half milk, and then it was sometimes found to be too aristocratic for his plebeian appetite. Porridge accommodated many ways. It was cooling in summer, warming in winter, as the prejudice went ; and then it left a sense of fulness when partaken of, yet so easy of digestion, that the partaker would be ready for a second "mess" before the pots were sided belonging to the first. The weaver experienced that degree of satisfaction with his meal which, for the moment, regards with indifference the possibility of famine ; and, he was now blowing himself off at the door, as if the keen air of the morning was as necessary to his comfortable respiration as a cool breeze in July. By way of novelty, he was "dressed up ;" meaning by the term, that he had piled on more clothes than usual, and thereby indicating that a journey was to be performed. His clogs were newly greased, and above them a pair of thick "wellers" did the duty of leggings, and seemed by their presence to ignore the

possibility of the snow penetrating to his ancles. His coat, which had never allowed any intimacy to grow up between the buttons and the button-holes, was laced in front with two bands of "clewkin," or "lindert t'gether," as he would have said; and his throat, instead of its habitual bareness, was wrapped in a thick red "comforter," his chin and nose peeping out above it like an eccentric W.

Joe looked anxiously down the "fowt," as if expecting somebody coming that "gate"—coughing away his disappointment as shadow after shadow flitted through the thin mist without halting at the cottage door. Presently one taller than the rest "loomed in the distance," grew more distinct as it approached, until the bell-like voice of Lung Yeb rung a lusty "Good mornin'" to anybody that might be listening.

"Oh, theaw art comn at last," said Joe, as the old hunter flung open the garden gate, and placed his hunting staff against the fence; "Aw've bin waitin' on thi for welly an heawr. Aw thowt theaw'd ha bin here afore dayleet."

"Eh, mon, that heawsin we had yesterday held mi deawn i' bed as if aw'd had three or four weight stones ut top on mi, or else aw should ha' bin here afore th' wink o' leet," said Yeb. "It's a rare mornin', Joe, for huntin beawt dogs. Aw could prick a meawse across th' 'Five Acre' beawt spectekles; for t' greawnd's as white an' as level as if it had bin dustud o'er wi' a fleaur poke. Hast' had thi breakfast?"

"Ay, an' welly ready agen," replied Joe. "We

dunno purtend t'reawk i' bed till th' sun bruns us eawt, if we hanna mich o' nowt t' do. Come, if we'n look sharp, we'st happen catch Aaron afore he goes eawt onywhere; an' aw should liket us t' see him th' fust of onybody."

"Aw feel," said Yeb, looking dry about the mouth, "ut if someb'dy ud offer mi a droit o' dhrink aw should no' slat it i' ther face. Dust think Daf ud tak' th' hint if one wurt' just co' and stare at him?"

"Well, he tow'd mi yesterneet for t' co as we went up, an' he'd see ud we didno getten frozen fast in a doytch bottom for want o' summat t' thoe us." And Joe drew on his hat till little could be seen betwixt it and the red comforter.

"That's reet," said Yeb; it sharpens one's nose up a bit; an' if we mun go a huntin afther varment we'n need t' put o' in. It'll be a job if they're noane getten up."

"Getten up, sure," said Joe, with a chuckle; "Theaw never knew Daf t' be i' bed if ther leeast chance of a carther crackin' his whip afore th' dur; an' Timmi's an' Owd Boxer wurn beawlin past a hawe an heawr sin'."

"Oh, then, come on!" and the two strode up the lane, and directly were slipping about in the front of the "Pig and Fork."

"Che-howe-boy!" sang out Yeb, as they gained the freshly-sanded door-step. "Ther's a betther scent here, Joe, nor ther is at th nog eend of a loom-pawst. Someb'dy's givin' th' fryin'-pon what for; by th' mass!

Hallo, Daf! is o' that for thisel?" alluding to a soup plate full of fried ham collops and eggs which were filling the kitchen with a delicious odour.

"Well, yor welcome to have a meawthful apiece," replied boniface, "if yo'n a mind t' put yor knayve i'th' trough. Poo up a cheer; an' yo' too, Joe, an' aw'll find yo' some tools t'worth wi."

"Eh, we're nea wantin' nowt o'th sort, Daf," said Yeb, getting hold of an empty pint pot, and raising it to his lips as though he was not aware of its emptiness. "Well, come, here's betther luck! Theaw knows owd Ailse at th' 'Wheel an' Barrels' i' Waverlow, dostno Daf."

"Yoi."

"Well, when onybody's bin fuddlin' theere o'th o'er neet, an' goon straight whoam beawt co'in anywhere else—"

"Ther's a pint for 'em i'th' mornin'," said the landlord, finishing the sentence.

"Just soa," said Yeb; "aw'm fain theaw's begun o' havin' so mich thowt abeawt thi', so here's to thi good yealth. What! hallo! nawe, th' pot's a hole i'th' bottom, aw think. Theaw ext mi t' sup, didt'no!"

"Not o' that; ther's summut betther for yo;" and the landlord stepped into the bar, returning directly with two tumblers of hot punch, which he handed to his visitors.

"Dost expect any brass for these," asked Lung Yeb, who took hold of his tumbler, and made an eye-glass of the ring of the "crusher."

"Ger it at th' safe side o' yor teeth, an' say nowt abeawt it," replied the landlord, tossing over his collops with an air of delightful anticipation that made the very chairs and tables look hungry. "Aw know th' arrand yor gooin on, an' yo'n want summut fort' keep th' frost fro gettin' ont' yor stomachs ; so dhrink, an' if yo wanten another apiece yo're welcome."

"Well, here's toart thi !" exclaimed Joe-o'-Dick's, giving a nod as he raised the glass to his lips.

"Th' same here !" said Lung Yeb, following his friend's example by taking a "swig" at the punch.

"Aw think we'st need no mooar o' this sort," said Joe ; "it's makkin mi t' feel swimmy o'ready. If wi getten too mich we'st be turnin' th' woald up side deawn, same as Owd Neddy-at-th'-Loane-eenddid when he stood on his yed fort' goo through th' chamber window."

"Oh, neaw yo' mention Owd Neddy," said Daf, "there Sam, Hopper as they co'en him, co'ed yester-neet a-warmin' hissel. He lookt well frozen stiff. He sed he'd getten up t'th' knees i' th' bruck wi' slippin' off th' Well-Loane Bridge."

Old Joe twisted his head suddenly at this, and looked round at his companion.

"Yeb," said he, "heaw does that mon get a livin' ; he wortches noane neaw, an' he looks betther off nor th' mooast o' foke?"

"Well, between us three," replied Yeb, "aw think he gets a livin' wi *findin'* things afore they're *lost*. Smobeeart's hens wurn makkin' a noyse i'th' cote

tother neet, an when he went fort' see what ther wurt' to do, Hopper wur limpin' past just same as if he thowt someb'dy wur afther him."

The knob of Joe's stick went up to his forehead, and he stared at the fire for about a minute, as if he was turning something over in his mind that appeared to afford himself great satisfaction. Jumping up suddenly, he said, "Yeb, we're forgettin' what we set eawt' for. Come, let's be off before th' sun melts ony o'th' snow; for its gooin t' be a nice breet day."

The weaver might well make the latter observation; for the morning was getting "nice" and "breet." The mist had cleared away, and the sun was spreading its rays over the snow with an effect so dazzling that the eye could hardly bear to look upon it.

"Harry Andrey winno be browt up till t' morn (tomorrow), they sen," remarked the landlord; "soo it'll give 'em time fort' get somb'dy t' tawk for him."

"That's reet," said Joe; "we'st happen find sum-mut eawt afore then; so come on Yeb. We'n maybe co as we come back, Daf, an' tell thi heaw we'n gone on."

The two then set out upon their journey; passing through the village without being accosted by anyone; which was a wonder from the number of gossips that were congregated at places, talking in doleful accents about the incidents of the night before. But Joe-o'-Dicks was occupied with his own thoughts and speculations; and Lung Yeb was keenly sniffing the

morning air, hunterwise, and making feints at jumping, as if he calculated he could clear a "hedge-backing" without much effort.

Journeying in this manner for about twenty minutes, they reached the "Hillock," and found everything about the place so much like what it usually was that they fancied for a moment nothing out of the ordinary course had happened. The blind of one window was down ; but the others looked bright and cheerful, as was their wont when the sun shone upon them. There was a light as from a good fire twinkling in the little parlour, and the smoke from the chimney over there went up gaily, and formed its little cloud above as if reluctant to take itself away. A pretty quarrel was going on betwixt three or four sparrows : each of which claimed a patch of roof whence the snow had been melted ; and a little dog that apparently took a delight in making footprints where none had been made before, gambolled amongst the rhododendrons and skeletons of shrubs in front of the dwelling.

Joe knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by the servant, who, guessing that their errand was to see master, bade the visitors enter.

Why, Joe wondered, did the girl look so sad ? Surely nothing worse had happened.

"It fayvers gooin to a buryin'," remarked Yeb. But Mr. Hartley making his appearance, and bidding his friends "Good morning," in a whisper, further observations were not made, and the three entered the little parlour.

"A sad affair, this," said Aaron, shaking his head and sighing. "I'd rather the whole of my stock-in-trade had disappeared than that young man had been implicated in even this trifling theft."

"Triffin'!" exclaimed Joe, with a look of intense surprise; "aw thowt they'd ta'en o' yo' had."

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Hartley; "a few pounds of silk only—some of it on bobbins, and the rest in the hank—is missing. It would have been nothing but for the robbery itself."

"Heaw wur it fund cawt?" asked Lung Yeb.

"The servant, being left in the house alone," said Mr. Hartley, "heard, as she thought, a crash among the bobbins, which were mostly tins; and, going to the back door to give an alarm, saw a man making his escape through a window. He had a wallet on his shoulder, which, likely enough, contained the stolen silk; but there being no one except the servant at home pursuit was out of the question. The policeman, however, happened to be near, and, hearing the alarm, came and found Andrew in the garden. The officer did not directly charge Harry with being concerned in the robbery, but with being there for an unlawful purpose, which the young man did not attempt to deny; hence his being taken into custody. The rest I daresay you know."

"He's never done it!" exclaimed Joe, compressing his lips, and holding out his gripped fist as if its falling on his knee would convince everybody that he was right. "He's never done it!" he repeated,

letting his hand fall ; "if he *has*, aw'll swallow that foye-potther, cove-rake an' o'—neaw then !"

"No one would rejoice more than I should to find the youth innocent," said Mr. Hartley ; "but circumstances are so much against him that I fear his conviction is inevitable."

"Aw tell yo agen—he's never done it !" Joe reiterated, emphasising his words by a demonstration on one of his clogs. "He ses he has no ; an' aw con believe him."

"You have seen him, then," said Mr. Hartley.

"Ay, aw see'd him ith' lockups, yesterneet, an' he hardly favvert knowin' what he're takken up for. When he're tow'd it wur for stalin he sed he wur noane guilty o' nowt o' that sort i' sich a way ut aw could believe him ith' face o' everythin'."

"What makes the evidence more conclusive" said Mr. Hartley, is, that his apron was found lying in the garden, under this very window. It makes it almost clear that he had taken it off, the better to screen himself from observation."

"That sartinly looks feaw," [foul] said Lung Yeb ; "bo ther must ha' bin someb'dy else, if ther a wallet full carried off. Harry couldno' do that an' be ith' garden at t' same time, could he, Joe ?"

"No mooar he could," said Joe ; "beawt he're same as th' pa'son at th' owd church i' Birchwood, ut praiches at three places at once't—by *proxy*, or summit as they coen it. Bo as theaw ses—it looks feaw. It does, it does. Well, Mesthur Hartley, yo seen we'n

come—Yeb an' me—fort see if we can be of any sarvice toart findin' eawt whoa this tother mon is. Aw've gotten a wrinkle i' this noddle o' mine, an so has Lung Yeb theere, an' puttin' 'em booath t'gether, same as twinin'-in a piece, we thinken ut we can get at summut ut'll happen clear things up abit, if yo'n noa think ut we're putting ussels forrud, yo' seen."

"If you could afford the least clue to the really guilty party," said Aaron, "you would greatly oblige me, I'm sure, besides greatly favouring the ends of justice. God forbid that we should punish the innocent! It makes me tremble when I reflect on the responsibility to God and my fellow man that is now hanging upon me through this occurrence; and I would gladly lose all that is gone and think nothing of it if the crime could be wiped out, or justice appeased by the sacrifice. Pursue your inquiries by all means. I will see that you have all the assistance that legal authority can render you. But, may I not ask what course you intend to take, or what foundation you have for supposing that you can get on the right track?"

"Ay, it's just theere, Mesther Hartley," said old Joe, eagerly; "its a *track* ut we're afther. Yeb theere—if he has no' as good a nose as a founmart dog, can prick a varment foowt as weel as onybody; an' he wants t' see if he canno' prick a thief's foowt as weel, if th' snow is no' too far gone. Neaw, then!"

"Strange," said Aaron, thoughtfully, "that the idea has not occurred to me before. It may afford

some chance of tracking the offender, and giving him up to justice; that is, if we have not secured the right one already. By all means set about your work at once. I'll take good care that you're well rewarded for your trouble, whether successful or not. God bless you!"

"Aw'm ready neaw," said Joe.

"So am I," responded Yeb.

"Come on, then."

Mr. Hartley led his two amateur detectives to the rear of the premises,—showed them the broken window where the thief or thieves had entered the warehouse; and Lung Yeb immediately commenced examining the snow with all the eagerness of an old hunter. There were several footprints near; but nothing peculiar could be observed about them. They were just such marks as anybody's feet might have made without fear of their being traced to any particular shoe. Directly Yeb was seen to pause over a print that struck him as being singular in its impression. He looked at it earnestly; stooped down to examine it more closely; lower still he stooped, and shook his head, as forming a reluctant conclusion; then, raising himself, exclaimed—

"Clogs!"

"Oh, my!" gasped Joe-o'-Dick's. "Poer Harry! Ther his clogs, aw con tell by th' little jackass shoon upo' th' heels. Owd Planker i' Welbruck, his god-feyther, made 'em. Oh dear me!"

"I would rather it had not been discovered," said

Mr. Hartley ; "upon my life I would. What could the poor fellow have been doing here, unless——"

"Let's look furr," interrupted Yeb ; and he stalked down the field, and again set his eyes to work. About five minutes passed in silence, during which time old Joe stood like one stupified, gazing at the damning foot-print, whilst his companion was ferreting about as if he expected tracking some of his old game, and was just getting on the trail. Hollo ! what made the old hunter jump up, slap his knees, and indulge in other demonstrations of the wildest ecstasy ? He had made another discovery, and was not long in communicating his success to his friends.

"Joe, come here," he shouted ; "an' yo' too, Mes-thur Hartley, if yo' pleasen."

The two hastened to the spot indicated by Yeb's finger, and which the latter was "setting," as if afraid of its escaping him.

"Dun yo' see nowt ?" said the hunter.

"Nobbo th' same o'er agen as we'n seen afore," replied Joe-o'-Dicks, pottering with his stick in the snow.

"Theaw does no' behanged ! Look here, one, *two*, three, *four*, five, *six* ; a hop an' a derry-deawn, by owd Harry ! Someb'dy's bin herè ut limps as ill as Limpin' Ike."

"Owd Ike it could no be ; for he're at th' stir yesterneet, theaw knows," said Joe.

"To be sure he wur," said Yeb ; "bo is ther nob'dy else ut limps ; Come on ; let's look a bit furr,

an' see which road they'n gone. Straight deawn toart th' bruck, aw see."

Down towards the brook they went; the track of halting footsteps still indicating itself in the snow; leaving no doubt in the minds of those who saw them, that the impressions were made by some one walking with a peculiar step.

"We're on th' reet scent neaw," sung out Yeb, as he fixed his hunting staff in the river's bed, and swung himself over. "We'st find his kennel at th' eend on't; that's sartin. Hello! o's as smoot o' this side as if he'd flown o'er it. Where the d—I can he ha' gone? He would no swim deawn th' bruck, belike?"

"He's happen *doubt*," suggested Joe.

"If he has he's hoppt o' one leg an' gone backert," said Yeb. "Put thi nose as nee th' greawnd as theaw con an' look deawn that side, whol aw look deawn this. He'll pop eawt somewheere, or else he's gone to th' sae;" and Yeb strode down the brook side, his companion following on the opposite bank, until the party reached Well Lane Bridge. No traces of footsteps were visible over the whole distance, which was nearly half a mile, although the searchers allowed a considerable latitude to their vision, and examined the ground very closely. At the bridge the path was so beaten as to render it impossible to distinguish one footprint from another; and now the hunter acknowledged himself at "faut."

"Yeb," said Joe-o'-Dicks, intimating with his finger that he wished to confer with his friend: "theaw

recollects what Daf at th' Split Bacon sed this morn-
ing, abeawt someb'dy co'in yesternest a warmin'
thersel."

"What, Hopper!"

"Ay."

"He sed he'd slipt off th' bridge into th' bruck.
Well, aw'll be sunken!"

"Here thy wrinkle pieces up to mine," said Joe.
"Mesther Hartley, we han it."

"Indeed!"

"Harry Andrey may ha' bin hangin' abeawt yore
heawse for summat. Whoa knows bo he met ha' bin
peewectin' afther th' sarvant; bo that wallet coom
deawn th' bruck here; its as plain as a pike-staff.
Hopper's bin in at it; yo' may depend on't."

"As sure as eggs are eggs," said Lung Yeb.

"You know the man, then," observed Mr. Hartley.

"Know him?"

"Know Hopper? We knewn his feyther an' grom-
feyther afore him."

"But what sort of character is he?"

"Wheay," said Joe, "he's one ut ud be rare an'
fearst if he met onybody wi brass i' ther pocket in a
lone place of a dark neet."

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Hartley, "a desperate man,
is he? Well, we'll go back to my house. I expect the
policeman up shortly; and we must confer with him
as to what had best be done. Come, make up your
minds to dine with me to-day. Both of you, I dare
say, can be spared from home."

"Ay, they could spare me till next Kesmus," said Joe-o'-Dick's, with an expression in his countenance which seemed to add further that he could spare them as well. "An, then aw should be as big a boggart as an empty buttery. If ther's any pikin' o' teeth at eawr heawse, it's when th' herrin' chap's bin."

Mr. Hartley laughed, and the party began to retrace their steps towards the "Hillock," Lung Yeb dilating with considerable rapture on the success of their novel expedition, and Joe-o'-Dick's descanting on the frowardness of human nature exemplified in the conduct of "Hopper," who had had as good a bringing up as most young men in the village, or about there; his father being an honest man, and of a family that had held up its head above vice or crime for as many generations past as the oldest of them could remember.

When they reached the "Hillock," they found George Watson pacing to and fro in the little parlour in quite an unaccountable state of excitement. He had absented himself from home at a very early hour for some purpose or other, and had just returned. Whither he had been, or what was his business will shortly appear.

It was evident the young man was suffering from a deep perturbation of mind. But if his head fell upon his breast, there was nothing dark or violent in his looks. In his moral nature George Watson was still the same. The heart that was now wildly beating would as freely have responded to the touch of charity as ever if necessity had prompted; but there are things
holds dearer than worldly wealth—for

commerce in which no medium was ever coined—which, if exchanged at all, will have heart for heart.

Mr. Hartley felt concerned at the altered manner of his young friend ; and would have sought to learn the cause with most eager solicitude had not the servant announced that the policeman was waiting in another room, and anxious to be going.

"I'll attend to him at once," said Mr. Hartley ; and was leaving the room when he felt George Watson's hand upon his arm.

"Stay, Mr. Hartley—a moment," entreated George, "I want a word with you before you go. I've been to see Andrew this morning. He has confessed everything to me."

"Indeed," exclaimed Mr. Hartley, staggering.

"Everything," repeated George.

"Then he's guilty?"

"Guilty in the eyes of society of other crimes than the one imputed to him, for which he prayed that he might be pardoned, and in atonement offered to banish himself from his native country for ever."

"You hear that, friends," said Mr. Hartley, overcome by the unwelcome nature of the information.

"Ay," said Joe-o'-Dicks ; "it's o' up wi' him neaw, poor Harry !"

"And poor ——," but George checked himself, and turning to his friend, said, "Well, Mr. Hartley, without consulting you, knowing that it would meet your approbation, I have on my own account sent to Birchwood to engage the best counsel possible for

the poor fellow. That course I felt sure you would not object to."

"Bless you, George! no."

"I feel an interest in this unfortunate affair," continued George, "that I could only have felt had the young man been my own brother; and I have resolved in my mind that, at whatever cost, his innocence of crime shall be established, come what may of any other charge. But the policeman is waiting."

"To be sure he is," said Mr. Hartley. "What a strange fellow you are, George! I cannot account for this interest of yours; but bless you, for all that!"

The two gentlemen went to attend upon the officer, leaving Joe-o'-Dick's and his companion to make the acquaintance of a jag of beer (which from some cause or other remained for a considerable time untasted), and to pass their individual comments on the unfortunate turn which events appeared to be taking.

The conference lasted for some time, until within a few minutes of dinner being announced; and the two wondered, but were afraid to inquire, what had been decided; and thus remained in nervous ignorance of the same until the afternoon saw them on their way back to Langley-side. Then it was that the uproar in the village, the running to and fro of old and young, the talking groups that were assembled at every corner, the brighter looks that some wore who were gloomy in the morning, and the frequent pro-
of a name which to themselves had that

day been familiar, informed them as well as if the crier had given it out, what additional event had taken place.

That night Harry Andrew had a bedfellow, who had to sleep with the handcuffs on for fear of his attempting to make his escape, who swore deep oaths at people that were absent, but spoke kindly to Harry ; and who, when in that restless state betwixt sleeping and waking, murmured something about "The bright rosy morning," which he had heard his companion whistle, and wished him to whistle again.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIDOW ANDREW was engaged in preparations for her humble breakfast, on the morning that her son was to be brought before the magistrate at Birchwood. It was a somewhat tedious occupation for the poor woman, judging from the time spent over it, for there were so many times she had to sit down and cry ; so many times she had to go to the window—look through it—shake her head, and return ; so many times she had to gaze at the vacant loom, the empty bed, and listen as though she heard, or fancied she heard, that dear familiar whistle, merrily warbling in the distance. The kettle spouted out its steam until dewlike drops hung on the whitewashed mantelpiece ; the toast burned black, and was turned and turned again, as if expected to whiten by the process ; and the poor soul would seem to wonder why she had only occasion for one cup and saucer, why only one chair was drawn up to the table, or why the house was so very, very quiet. Dead—was he ? Dead to honour he might be,—dead to the world, but not dead to her. The son might be dragged a felon through the streets, his future be associated with low-browed villany that knew not the better life—might be cut off for ever from the love

and respect of his kind ; but when the mother's heart called up his image, it would be as comely and spotless as when she first beheld it,—the pledge of two affections that the grave alone could sever.

It was while wondering if she had put any tea in the teapot that Widow Andrew was startled by a gentle knock at the door. What or whom could it be? Not Harry. He would not have stood on such ceremony, but flung open the door at once, and filled the house with merriment. Not a neighbour even, for those clumsy people would have given a louder knock than that, if they had not entered without knocking at all ; and marvelling on the strangeness of such a visit, the poor woman got up from her chair and went to the door. The knocking was not a mere fancy ; for the keyhole was darkened by the shadow of some one outside, and with a trembling hand the latch was raised.

With her head modestly bent, a thick veil hiding her face, a small basket on her arm, and attended by a little dog that was making a swing of the skirts of her dress, a lady of somewhat youthful appearance bade Mrs. Andrew "Good morning !"

"You will excuse me calling," she said, with a trifling embarrassment in her manner, "but I wanted to see you. I'm a stranger to you, I dare say,"

"Come in, whoever yo' are," said Mrs. Andrew, opening wider the door. "Aw should know yo', bo aw conno' co' yo' to mind. Yo're noa fro' th' Ho', are yo'?"

"No," replied the lady, shaking her head.

"Well, sit yo' deawn. Yo'n but a poor place to come to ; bo yo're welcome."

"Make no apologies, Mrs. Andrew, I pray you," said the lady, "What a beautiful morning it is !"

"Ay, aw dar'say it is," rejoined the widow ; "bo aw've hardly looked eawt o' th' dur yet ; so aw dunno know ; win yo' tak' yo'r bonnet an' cloak off ?"

"Excuse me for the present, if you please, I am a little heated with walking, and might take cold," said the lady.

"An' aw've sich a poor foyer," said the widow, taking up the poker, and bringing as much bright red into the bars as possible. "Poor folk han to mind, these times, heaw they usen what bits o' things they gotten owd on ; for its hard scrattin an' toylin ; an' little to be addled when we'en done eawr best, God knows."

"I'm quite aware that times are bad with you," said the visitor ; "but it is to be hoped they will mend. Brighter days are coming, I'm sure, if we can only wait. You look snug in this little cottage of yours."

"Dun yo' think so ?" said the widow.

"Everything so clean and orderly," and the lady glanced round at the cupboard, at the drawers, at the eight-days' clock, at the loom, with the—to her—strange furniture on the top of it ; and observed again how snug the place looked. She had taken her veil a little on one side, but her face was still hidden from the widow.

"Yo' see'n," said the latter, without observing that her visitor's attention was directed towards the cloth-beam of the loom, "aw've noa cleant up as aw should ha' done this day or two; aw hanna' th' heart to do. Aw've a bit o' trouble o' mi mind——" Here she raised her apron to her eyes, and was some time before she could utter another word. At length, after giving two or three sobs, she made an effort to compose herself, and briefly observed that she had an only child then in prison on a charge of robbery; perhaps the lady had heard.

"I am informed of that painful circumstance already," said the visitor; "and, knowing your distress, came to offer you comfort; if any little service of mine will avail you."

"Aw've need on't, aw've need on't, God knows," sobbed the widow; "bo aw'd rayther someb'dy ud comfort yon poor lad. As for me; it matters no mich; for aw hanna' long t' be cawt o' mi grave; not if he's no' th' lad ut he wur."

"Take heart, my good woman," said the lady; "Your son has friends."

"Ay, bo what con friends do for him, if he's done what they sen he has?"

"But his guilt has yet to be proved, and from what I hear there is not sufficient evidence to convict him."

"Ay, bo he may ha' done it, an' nob'dy nobbo' God ha' seen him," said Mrs. Andrew; though her heart told her at the time that it was as possible for the sun to descend and consume the earth, as for the one hope

of her life to be blasted by crime. "Awst never forget that day," the widow continued; "heaw queer he looked; heaw he kept moanderin abeawt ith' heawse like someb'dy ut wur noane reet; an' fotchin up sich soiks (sighs) as aw never yerd him do before. Happen th' owd lad wur temptin' him then, an' pooin' at him (as he did Christ upo' th' meawntin ith' wilderness) till he gan hissel up an' took to th' dark road."

A blush speak itself over the face of the young lady; her eyes fell, and the fluttering which took possession of her breast was as of one upon whom a new light was breaking.

Harry Andrew had not made his appearance at the "Hillock" as usual on the Christmas morning. Why had he not done so? What motive held him back? It was difficult to find him when required to take round the invitations to the tea-and-rum baggin; and even when found, "Maggy," the servant, said, "He looked strangely altered."

"You have not breakfasted, I see," observed the visitor, trying to turn the subject of conversation, if only to momentarily relieve herself of her embarrassment.

"Well, aw hardly wantut ony," replied the dame; "An' just neaw aw dunno' know whether aw've had it or not. It's hard swallowin mayte when th' inside's so full o' trouble."

"Still you should not neglect yourself," said the lady; "It might bring on worse consequences. If you fell sick in your loneliness, what would become of you?"

"Ay, ay, indeed ; what would ? Well, aw'll get it ready ; an' yo'st have a cup wi' me, if yo' winno' think it's noa good enough for yo'. Yo' may know ut we conno' have sich nifles as folk ut are betthur off."

"You might think I was inviting myself, which in truth I did not mean to do," said the visitor. "But I have brought a little of something that may help to strengthen you against the trials you may have to meet ; for, let the best come of the worst in this sad affair, you will have need of some kind of nourishment or other to sustain you."

So saying she opened her basket and took out a bottle containing wine, some nice cakes, such as Widow Andrew had not seen before ; a packet of tea, of delicious aroma ; several bunches of grapes ; "two picthurs o' butthur," as the widow afterwards described them ; another bottle containing a bright red liquid, some crisp-looking celery, and two pots of preserves.

"Eh, bless yo' ! whatever mun aw do wi o' thoose good things ?" exclaimed Mrs. Andrew, taking hold of her apron, and unconsciously making a purse of it. "Aw'st never be able to thank yo' as aw should."

"Make the best use you can of such trifles," said the lady ; "you are welcome, I'm sure."

"Could aw send eawr Harry a bit, aw wondher ?" said the dame, looking up into the face of her benefactress as much as to say she could spare it all for him. "Aw dunno' think they keepen th' best o' tables in a lock-ups."

"Make yourself easy about your son ; I can assure you he is well provided for," said the lady.

"Eh, whoa ever are yo' ut's so good to us?" exclaimed the widow, tears coming into her eyes afresh. "Ther's nobbo' *one* young lady ut's owt like yo' ut a' know on; bo' aw never seed her yet to my knowledge; nobbo' when aw've been dhreecamin', and then hoo aults looked like a angel to mi. Eawr Harry knows hur wheel; an' whenever aw've axt him what sort of a lady hoo wur; he's tow'd me such a ramblin' tale abeawt what he'd seen i' books, an' i' suns, an' i' picturs; an' seed ther nowt like hur i' noane on 'em, ut hoo must be a angel; aw'm sure."

"Who is the young lady you mean?" inquired the visitor, with some hesitation in her manner.

"Miss Hartley, Aaron Hartley's dowther, up at th' 'Hillock.' Yo' happen known her."

"But you have never seen her yourself, you say."

"Eh, nawe; aw never have. Aw wish aw mut see hur; bo' aw durino go mich eawt o'th' dur, yo' see'n; an' that ackeawnts for it. Well, come, yo'n have a cup o' tae wi' mi; se tak' yor things off, an' aw'll get it ready."

The visitor rose, took off her bonnet and cloak, and, as she placed them on the old chest of drawers that were so bright she could see herself in them, the eyes of the widow were following her movements with an interest and a curiosity which were only exceeded by the admiration she felt when the lady's veil was laid aside, and her features were disclosed.

"If Miss Hartley's any prattier nor *hwr*, wheay then hoo mun be summut above a woman," the widow observed to herself, as she paused in the act of pouring out the tea.

The face, the person of the visitor were beautiful, as Mrs. Andrew had observed; and indeed might have invited comparison with the latter's ideal of Miss Hartley, not only in personal charms, but in goodness of heart; for the young lady was no other than Miss Hartley herself, though for certain reasons she desired to be unknown.

The two sat down to breakfast; the elder lady strongly objecting at the first to the other's pouring some of the contents of the red bottle into her cup, but giving way before the cork could be abstracted; and tasting with her teaspoon and shaking her head, as though it was the worst physio that could possibly be prescribed. She was, however, induced to take a smaller quantity in the second cup, and before the breakfast concluded, appeared prepared to admit that the morning was much finer and warmer than she had thought.

"Eh, if eawr Harry wur here neaw," said the widow—a nice glow mantling over her face, which had not lost all traces of its youthful bloom—"heaw he would marlock for t' see me dzinking *rum* an' tae." (It was brandy.) "He's a strange lad, is eawr Harry,—sometimes as sollit as a hommer, moiderin' his yed wi' books ut he gets fro' somewheere, an' as cross as a pig-foowted warp if anybody spakes to him; an' then

at another time he'd come and catch howd on mi, an' nip mi on his back, an' trot reawnd th' heawse wi' mi like a little jackass. An' then aw'd thump him o'er th' back for a pousement! Aw think of his feyther, ut wur as like him as one bobbin is to another; bo' if aw'd sit deawn for t' cry, that lad would ha' made some mooar marlockin', an' aw'd ha' forgettin' mi trouble i' no time."

"But he'll be leaving you before long I should think," observed Miss Hartley; looking towards the fire as she made the remark.

"Eh, aw hope not; surely they'n noa send him away. Yo' sed yo' thowt he met get off beawt owt."

"And so I think he will," said the young lady; "but I was meaning something else."

"Ay, bo' he's never begun o' *wenchin'* yet," said the widow, with some vivacity, and guessing with a mother's ready instinct at her visitor's meaning. "It's soon enough for him, too; beside, he says he'll tarry wimmi as lung as aw like, if aw dunno' turn him eawt o'th' dur. That he's sed monny a time, an aw con believe him."

The lady started as the Waverlow Church clock rung nine. The prisoners would be about setting out to Birchwood, and wishing to avoid the crowd that might probably be gathered on the occasion, she intimated her wish to be going.

"I didn't think I had stayed so long," she observed, rising from the table, and gently pushing away her little companion, which had begun to play about her.

"I must leave you with the hope that all will be well, and that your son may be restored to you before the day is over."

"God bless yo' for that," exclaimed Widow Andrew; "It'll be a sore time to mi till aw yer heaw he's gone on. Aw'd ha' gone to Birchwood mysel, bo' aw feel, what wi' moanderin' and frettin', aw ha' no strength for t' stond it; an' they'n happen do bettther beawt mi, though one does noa alus think so."

"Good morning, my dear Mrs. Andrew."

"Good mornin', an' bless yo'!"

The visitor departed; the widow watching her down the fold, and feeling a chilling loneliness creep over her as the garden gate closed. In another moment the poor woman was as deeply buried in her grief as ever.

CHAPTER IX.

THE proceedings at the Birchwood petty sessions never created a deeper interest, or were more the subject of anxious speculation, than on the third day of the Christmas of 1860. It had spread over the town, and made the circuit of every village and hamlet within the sound of St. Swid's bells, that an examination of some import was to take place that day; and, as there was a surplus of idlers, or people who were at a "loose side," consequent on the week's festivities, the streets about the Town Hall exhibited signs of becoming unusually crowded long before the time fixed for the magistrates assembling. But it might have been observed that the class of people mostly represented on this occasion were not of a character usually interested in police proceedings. There certainly was the ordinary scum of low localities, in dirty, ragged shawls, and burglarious-looking jackets, and otherwise distinguished from respectable indigence by contused cheekbones and discoloured eyes; but these congregated together in a narrow street at the back, where the prison van discharged its load of noisy, blaspheming humanity, and where nothing but vice and squalor could thrive.

The front of the Town Hall presented a far different spectacle. Here were assembled a newly-washed, clean-shirted multitude, made up of little knots of four or five persons, mostly engaged in conversation, and, doubtless, settling between themselves points of law that would have puzzled the twelve judges. Others were leisurely pacing to and fro ; now and then casting an expectant look towards the blackened door beneath the portico, over which a solitary policeman held guard, or watching with an interest detached from the object of their presence there, the loading and unloading of the omnibus at the door of the "Blue Elephant." These were men and women from the country, as might be seen from the little narrow-tailed blue coat, and drab cord knee-breeches, the crimson cloak and antiquated bonnet that mingled picturesquely with the awkwardly worn costumes of a more modern fashion. Langley-side had sent nearly two-thirds of its adult population ; and Welbrook and Waverlow were represented by a scarcely less proportion of their male inhabitants.

Apart from the rest were a number of young men known by the characteristic appellation of the "Rough-and-Ready Club ;" who had fought cocks in the churchyard, and bonnetted the wardens when on their Sundays' round ; besides committing other excesses of a rough-and-ready and dare-devil nature. These would have made light of Harry Andrew under other circumstances—jeered him when he had passed a group of them at the "lone-eend," and addressed him

in terms expressive of ridicule whenever any of them had met him singly. He was of a character so far removed from these men as to become a constant mark for their least harmful rudeness; but anyone molesting him other than by the infliction of words, was certain of getting sore bones from some of the rest. They had turned out in their strength, had these rough young men, denoting by the fact that they had some congenial purpose in doing so; and the ordinary town bully cowered in his very shoes as he passed cautiously by the group, and contemplated with dismay the superior muscle which some of them displayed. It was rumoured that they intended rescuing "Hopper," who was a member of the club; and anyone the least acquainted with their antecedents would not be slow in crediting the rumour.

While the "Rough-and-Ready" were debating on some point or other, where and when to strike the blow, as some people would probably conjecture, a coach drove up to the door of the "Blue Elephant," and from it descended Mr. Aaron Hartley, followed by Mr. George Watson and another gentleman who had a lawyer-like appearance, and between whom and George a multitude of little confidences were being exchanged. These had scarcely alighted ere a second conveyance drove up, containing a tall muscular, well-dressed individual, who hardly appeared to belong to genteel society from the awkward manner in which he handed a fifth person—a lady—from the same vehicle. The whole party entered the tavern, and to

the steps of that establishment the mob of "Rough-and-Readys" betook themselves. The latter filed into the lobby and took possession of the taproom, which, beyond the presence of a couple of market people, an oyster woman, and a tramp, was conveniently empty when they entered.

"Neaw, then, for wark!" said the roughest-looking of the gang, and whose face, by some process or other, appeared to have been "pown" into all shapes except human. "A hawve a gallon o' ale th' fust, for aw'm as dhry as 'bacco dust;" and he struck the table with a fist that sounded as hard as a mallet, at which summons the landlord made his appearance.

"I hope, *gentlemen*, you're not come here to misbehave yourselves," said Boniface, feeling some misgivings as to the character of the visit with which his establishment was thus honoured.

"Bring us th' ale in, an' then talk," said the leader, throwing down a shilling on the table. "If we braken owt beside a yed or two we'n pay for it, if that'll satisfy yo'."

"Mix it a bit softer, Bumper," said another of the gang, "or else we'st get nowt t' dhrink. Tak' no notice on him, mesthur, (turning to the landlord), we'st be as quiet as a empty loomheawse. We may look roough, bo we know heaw t' behave ussels as weel as betther folk."

Pacified by this assurance, the landlord brought in the beer, and in retiring closed the door with a bang, as if to show who had the greatest authority to rule in that house.

"Neaw, then, what are we t' do?" said Bumper, after pitching a "tot" of ale down his throat as though it had been the yolk of an egg.

There was a pause of about a minute's duration, after which the speaker resumed,

"If we dunno o' poo one road we're lost, for ther's plenty o' police knockin' abawt."

"Whoa cares for th' police?" demanded one of the others."

"Well, aw dunno for one, if yo'n stond throe," said the redoubtable Bumper, filling out beer to the rest of his companions.

"Gie th' word an' let's be doin' o' summut," urged one, who insisted on drinking two "tots" of ale at a turn.

"Han yo' made up yo'r minds for t' do as aw tell yo'?" asked the leader.

"We han—we han!" responded several voices.

"An' Hopper is t' be reskied?" (rescued).

"If we can do it," put in another.

"Aw could thresh two policemen mysel," boasted a little barrel-shaped individual, with a very self-satisfied and determined look."

"So could I," rejoined another, who appeared eager and well qualified for rough work.

"If it hadno bin ut Hopper's one on us, aw'd rayther we'd had nowt t' do wi' it," said the mildest looking of the lot, if the term *mild* could possibly be applicable to the least ferocious of them.

"We could ha' done it safe yesterneet," said another,

"if Bumper theere hadno bin soft. We could ha' brokken into th' lockups yessily, an' gotten him eawt beawt any bother."

"Ay, bo' it ud ha' lookt so keawardly," pleaded Bumper. "Beside, it ud ha' made no spree. An' another thing too; if it wur t' do o'er again, aw should do th' same as aw did then. Neaw just hearken me," he continued, increasing in earnestness as he spoke, and at the same time throwing his cap on the table; "An' if anybody's owt t'say agen it, they may be gettin' ther jacket off."

All were astonished at the attitude which their leader assumed, and some sentiments of an uneasy nature were expressed in an undertone.

"A dozen yer sin," said Bumper, without relaxing a muscle, "ther wurno' a betther lad i' o' Langley-side nor aw wur. Aw geet ruinated bi comin' t' teawn here o' Sethurday neets, an' havin' t' feight mi road whoam agen till aw geet fond o' feightin'. Before then aw went to th' Sunday skoo, an' if ever ther wur a time i' my life ut aw should like t' live o'er agen that wur th' time. Harry Andrey went to th' skoo at same time, an' for o' ut he wur younger nor ony i'th' class beside, he used to taich us in a afthernoon when Owd Johnny Schoools wur havin' his nap, as he coed it, i'th' pilpit."

"Aw recollect Owd Johnny," interposed a junior member of the club; "he gan me pepper oncet wi' what he coed th' soft eend of a ruler, for lettin th' desk deawn when he'd his yed laid on it."

"Well, never mind that," resumed Bumper; "it's gettin' very nee ten o'clock, an' we'n summut t' do yet. As aw're sayin', Harry Andrey uset to teach us. Aw con see him neaw wi' his white bishop and frill, lookin' so innicent as he stood i'th' middle on us, tellin us hard words ut aw hanne' forgotten to this day. Neaw, then, aw'll stand by that lad through thick and thin, if it's nobbo for what he did then; an' if ever aw con get this face o' mine spoke-shavit into summit like what it owt be, aw'll go't skoo agen, an' be a different mon. Has onybody ther jacket off?"

No one had moved. All were silent and expectant, and seemed puzzled to conjecture what their leader was driving at.

"Neaw, it's just here," Bumper resumed; "it's Hopper an' Harry Andrey for it. T'one on 'em'll ha' t' goo i'th' hole; bo' it winno' be Harry; that aw'll tak' care on."

"Theaw'rt noa for showin' a white fither, arta?" said the little barrel-shaped fellow before alluded to.

"If doin' a reet thing's showin' th' white fither," replied Bumper, "aw wouldno' care just neaw if aw'd a hen cote full. Aw'd be futthert o'er wi' 'em like a dandy-cock; an' carry 'em abeawt as preawd as owd Donty feighter carries his heels."

Strange! a murmur of applause actually went round the room; and the mild individual before named got upon his legs, and said—

"Bumper's reet, an' aw'll back him."

"So will I," said another.

"An' as for me," said a third, taking off his cap, and looking at the floor as if he thought his present feelings hardly became him, or were out of place in such an assembly, "aw may do what aw never did i' mi life yet, aw may go deawn o' mi knees an' thank that lad for what he's done; for aw believe ut if it hadno' bin for him my feyther an' mother ud ha' bin clemmed to th' deeath this minit. They would by——nawe, aw winno' swear; bo they would, chaps—they would, aw'm sure. To mi thinkin',—bo aw conno' say nowt no mooar," and the young man sat himself down, and covered his face with his cap.

What business had a tear to be making its zig-zag course down such a cheek as Bumper's, as if it could with difficulty get over the knolls and interstices that hard usage had made on that damaged surface? Possibly it might have been "lang syne" that had called it into existence; the school days; the better time; the one feeling that never leaves the human breast so long as it beats for ought—the memory of a bright spot, a happy day in the dark wilderness of a wasted life. And Bumper wept; but his fist looked like iron for all that, so it was not cowardice that made him weep. It must have been the remembrance of "lang syne."

"As aw sed before," Bumper again began, "it's Harry an' Hopper for it. Which *on* us ever geet any good wi' havin' owt to do wi' Hopper?"

"He're my ruination," observed a junior member of the Rough-and-Readies; "for he oncet made me

t' howd mi grondfeyther's back-dur while he went into th' hen-cote; an' he swore he'd kill mi stark deead if ever aw sed owt abeawt it. Fro' that day to this aw never could feel a gradely mon. He aulus favvert shakin' his fist at mi. Bo aw hanno' bin o' ut he wantut mak mi into, noather."

"He met mi one day," said another, "when aw're gooin' for a peck o' wut-cakes for eawr folk, an' he made mi t' pitch him an' toss him till aw lost every hawpenny. Aw dust no' goo whoam o' two days afther that; an' when aw did goo whoam, mi feyther cleawted mi till aw began o' feelin' as bad as onybody. We'n o' on us a beginnin' an' we'st o' have a *endin* if we keepn on."

"Well, then," said Bumper, "aw think it's middlin' weel understood ut we owe'n a little bit of a turn to Hopper, an' ut its time t' pay it off. Aw've aulus bin deawn on him ever sin' he began o' comin' to th' teawn a time or two a week, an' gooin' back wi' a pocket full o' brass. Aw're sure he hadno' gotten it wi' wayvin'. Aw know summut ut 'ud mak him stare if he seed me bussin' th' book at th' teawn hall."

"What is it?" shouted several voices at once.

"Summut ut aw should no like him t' know abeawt mi" said the leader.

"Then eawt with it."

"Mak' a cleean crop on't."

"That aw meean t' do," said Bumper, "if its nobbo' for t' sake o' doin' summut for oncet ut aw con think at when aw'm gooin' t' bed. It's what aw geet yo' t'

come here for. Mesthur Hartley's i'th' t'other reawm, an' if aw just spake to him aw think aw con mak' a decal o' readiness abeawt things."

All appeared to divine what their leader was insinuating, and they urged him with a unanimity that did them credit to "goo in an' get his cowl o'er afore it wur too late."

With this injunction from his comrades, Bumper put on his cap, and sidling out of the room with a very awkward grace, sought the presence of Aaron Hartley and his friends. The interview was a brief one, as the morning was getting advanced, but it was so satisfactory to Mr. Hartley that he threw down a half-crown, and bade his new acquaintance see that his companions were attended to while the examination was going on.

Bumper returned to the taproom with a most picturesque smile upon his face, if the contortion his risible muscles were undergoing could be called a smile; and, saying he had "done it," produced the half-crown he had received, and ordered a whole gallon to drink Mr. Hartley's health.

CHAPTER X.

TEN o'clock boomed from the old tower of St. Swid's ; and as the last stroke fell, the greasy, blackened door beneath the portico of the Town Hall opened, and immediately the spacious court-room became filled with an anxious and motley auditory.

"Silence in court!" sang out a blue-liveried official, who stood as erect as a lamp-post at the door.

"Silence!" echoed another, as the three magistrates, entering by a side door, took their places on the bench. It may here be stated, to the credit of that much-maligned institution, an "English mob," that notwithstanding the two police officers invoked silence in a manner that could only have been resorted to had there been the wildest uproar going on, there was scarcely a whisper to be heard at the time, so intense was the interest manifested in the proceedings.

The magistrates on the bench were the Rev. John Goodear (chairman), Sampson Dewdrop, and G. H. Woodpate, Esqrs. ; these gentlemen being assisted in the interpretation of magisterial jurisprudence by an old, white-headed, brandy-faced clerk, who, like the worthy proprietor of "Dotheboys Hall," took frequent occasion to "air" himself, and "stretch his

legs" in the little back tap of the "Blue Elephant." There was a junior clerk also, who did least of the writing, and most of the impertinence; and, buried in a heap of blue foolscap, and surrounded by a knot of young officers, with white gloves and very smooth heads, sat the chief constable, talking with the air of a profound lawyer and an indomitable executive about a hamper of wine which was to be taken up to Mr. Dewdrop's house by one of the lamplighters when off duty.

The proceedings of the court commenced by a few summonses being granted to bring up people who could not agree with their neighbours, members of families who had fallen out and fought with each other, and delinquent "jerry lords" who had charitably accommodated overworked washerwomen and thirsty mechanics with "nightcaps" in quart jugs during prohibited hours. These disposed of, "first cases" were called; whereupon a brace of very ragged Irishwomen, whose statements neither magistrates, clerks, policemen, nor the public, could make head or tail of,—were fined six-and-eightpence and costs, for being considerably and patriotically drunk the night before, although (so much of their statements was with much difficulty comprehended) they had only taken a thousandth part of a "dhrop" between them, and that happened by the merest accident. A charge of unnecessarily propping up a lamppost at a very *early* hour in the morning, and thereby casting a reflection upon the servants of the corporation, who are sup-

posed to see to the town's property being in a secure position,—was next preferred against a rather dilapidated tailor, who pleaded as an excuse for his insane and sarcastic conduct, that, in consequence of the festivities of the season, he was labouring under an unusual pressure of “goose,” supplied by the host of the “White Lion,” where the “Golden Thimble Branch” of their “United Association” was held. This “lot” was also knocked down at six-and-eightpence; which sum not being forthcoming, nor likely to be, the poor fellow was ordered to be taken care of until Christmas was over. A few cases of breach of street by-laws were summarily referred to the watch committee, and the next names called were:—“Henry Andrew and Samuel Broadbent, *alias* Hopper!”

There was a rustle in the court as these names were called over, as though everybody had been sitting in an uneasy position and were adjusting themselves, the more conveniently and agreeably to watch the examination that was about to be proceeded with. Aaron Hartley, who was sitting at a table in the shadow of the clerk's desk, was seen to place his hand on his forehead, and appear to contemplate the knob of his walking stick with more than usual interest. At his elbow sat George Watson; and next to George was Mr. Lewis, barrister-at-law, who, as the names struck his ear, looked up from an earnest perusal of a voluminous brief. Immediately a curly head and a very open, honest looking face appeared above the railing of the dock, and such was the whispering that followed

this appearance that three or four "silences" had to be called. The whispering had scarcely subsided when it broke out afresh, this time called forth by another head and face protruding above the dock rail. Neither the features nor the expression of the latter were so prepossessing as the former. A "bullet" head, very closely cropped of its black hair; heavy, bushy eyebrows, the left slouching over the eye so as almost to conceal it; cheeks which at the jaws swelled out farther than the cheek bones; an overhanging upper lip, and a nose that appeared much too small for the face, were the most prominent physiognomical and cranological developments of the second prisoner; and the way in which he leaned over the dock and surveyed the different elements that composed the crowded court, would add nothing to the least favourable opinion that might have been formed of his character.

The chairman took off his spectacles, which he carefully wiped and placed upon his nose again, then partially repeating the operation, and fidgetting about until he was led to make an unsuccessful attempt to dip his glasses in the inkstand, the worthy and reverend gentleman somehow got the words out of his mouth which follow :—

"Henry Andrew and Samuel Broadbent, the charges against you are, that you, Samuel Broadbent, did, on the night of the 25th instant, break into the premises belonging to Aaron Hartley, situated at the 'Hillock,' and steal therefrom a quantity of silk and cotton used

for manufacturing purposes, and which was the property of the said Aaron Hartley, The charge against you, Henry Andrew, is that of being accessory before the fact, aiding and abetting the robbery, which, in substance, and, I may say, in the eye of the law, is equally felonious. Call the first witness."

"Margaret Clemson!" drawled out the clerk.

A young woman very neatly attired, and who blushed very deeply when her name was announced, here stepped timidly forward, and allowed herself to be assisted by a policeman into the witness box, which box being constructed of a small platform with imaginary sides, made it appear as though the witness was an article or "chattel" to be sold to the highest bidder.

"Now, my young woman," said the rector very blandly, "will you please to tell the court what you know about this alleged robbery?"

This was after the witness had made a show of kissing the cover of a very small book, presumed to be a Bible, but which, from its diminutive size and dirty £ s. d. looking binding, was popularly suspected of being a "ready reckoner."

The witness in a scarcely audible voice said—

"I am servant to Mr. Hartley, of the 'Hillock.' On the night of the twenty-fifth I was in the house by myself,—Mr. Hartley, Miss Hartley, and Mr. Watson, who is staying with the family, having gone on a visit to Langley-side. About nine o'clock, and as I was sitting by the kitchen fire, I heard a noise rattling of a number of tin-bobbins proceeding

as I thought, from the warehouse, which is close by. I then heard footsteps, and, feeling sure that some one had broken into the place, I went to the back door to give an alarm. I had no sooner opened the door than I observed a man in the act of creeping through one of the warehouse windows. I durst not show myself, but watched with the door part opened, and saw him take out what appeared to be a weaver's wallet, and make across the field with it. I then gave the alarm, and the policeman coming up, I told him what I had seen."

Mr. Lewis :—"Could you swear to the man you saw coming through the window?"

Witness : "No. I could not see him so distinctly."

Mr. Lewis ; "Do you think it was either of the prisoners?"

Witness : "I cannot say."

The Chairman : "You are quite sure that he took away a sack or wallet?"

Witness : "I am quite sure."

The Chairman : "You can stand down. Next."

"John Davies."

Police Sergeant John Davies here stepped forward, kissed the book before the clerk had mumbled the oath, and said—

"I was on duty near the 'Hillock' on the evening of the twenty-fifth. When within about two hundred yards of Mr. Hartley's house, I heard an alarm of 'thieves' given, and judging it to come from thereabouts, I proceeded to the spot, and was informed by

Mr. Hartley's servant of what had taken place. I then proceeded to examine the premises, and found that a window had been entered. I then went round to the warehouse door to see if that was secured. When I got to the end of the building, I met the prisoner Andrew running down the walk. On seeing me he made a spring at the fence, but getting entangled amongst the quicksets, I had no difficulty in securing him. I told Andrew he was my prisoner, and charged him with being there for an unlawful purpose. He did not deny the charge, but appeared much taken when he found himself in custody."

Mr. Lewis : " Did you—supposing the prisoner Andrew to have had some other purpose in visiting the 'Hillock' than what is laid down in the charge—question him upon it ?"

Witness : " I did."

Mr. Lewis : " What reply did he make ?"

Witness : " None."

The Chairman : " Did he offer any resistance ?"

Witness : " Not the slightest, your worship."

The Chairman : " You then conveyed him to the station ?"

Witness : " I did."

The Chairman : " Was any of the stolen property found upon him ?"

Witness : " The prisoner had nothing about him except the clothes he now appears in."

The Chairman : " Nothing in his pockets ?"

Witness : " Not a farthing ; nothing whatever."

The Chairman : "Poor fellow !" Mr. Goodear coughed as soon as he had uttered this exclamation, as though he thought it hardly became a magistrate, but had escaped him unintentionally. "What led to the apprehension of the other prisoner ?"

Witness : "Information that I received from Mr. Hartley."

The Chairman : "What was the substance of that information ?"

Here the clerk rose and whispered to the bench ; after which the witness was ordered to stand down, and "David Holt" was called.

This witness had a scrupulous objection to kissing the offered book, which he protested was not fit for a decent person to touch, as it had probably been "slavvert" on by thieves and other and nameless members of a depraved order of society, whom he referred to in very blunt terms. The bench, however, insisting on the observance in this instance of the usual forms of swearing witnesses, "Daf" compromised the matter by kissing his thumb nail, and proceeded at once to give his evidence.

"You know the prisoners ?" said the chairman of the bench, smiling at the witness as if from the recollection of his superior knowledge of cooking Christmas dinners.

Witness : "Well, aw owt t' do ; aw've seen 'em booath oft enough before neaw."

The Chairman : "What do you know about Broadbent ?"

Witness : " Well, if aw wur t' say aw knew out good abeawt him, aw should be tellin' a sproanger."

The Chairman : " A sproanger—what is that ?"

Witness : " A great thumpin' lie wi' a lid on."

(Laughter in the court, and " Silence!" from the officials.)

Here the elder prisoner gave the witness a most ferocious look, and clutched the dock rail as though he would like to fling it at him.

The Chairman : " Well, what do you know about Broadbent in connection with this case ?"

Witness : " O' ut aw know is—he coed at eawr heawse that neet a-warmin' hissels, an' he sed he'd slipped off th' Well Lone Bridge an' tumbled i' th' bruck."

The Chairman : " Is that all ?"

Witness : " That's o'."

The Clerk : " Can't you bethink yourself of something else ?"

" Besom !" exclaimed the witness, which, being interpreted to the bench, was understood to signify that he had closed his mouth, and did not mean to open it again.

Here the Chief Constable rose and said,—

" Your Worships,—It will be shown from the evidence of other witnesses how that the prisoner Broadbent had been traced from the ' Hillock ' on the morning following the robbery, by footprints left in the snow which exactly accorded with the form and size of his shoes, as well as with his peculiar mode of walking.

These footprints were distinctly visible all the way from the 'Hillock' across a field and down to the river ; and as they could not be discovered any further, it leaves us to suppose that he waded down the river, so that the track would be broken and pursuit eluded. It will be shown by another witness how that this evidence is not entirely circumstantial, but has its foundation in facts traced beyond doubt to the prisoner Broadbent. Would you again call John Davies ?

Police-sergeant John Davies was recalled, who testified to having examined the footprints spoken of, and compared them with the prisoner Broadbent's shoes. They exactly "tallied;" the snow being fresh and easily impressible at the time. He had not the slightest doubt of the footprints having been made by the prisoner.

"The next witness," said the chairman, nudging G. H. Woodpate, Esq., who appeared disposed to falling asleep.

The Clerk called "John Whitehead, *alias* Bumper!"

At this announcement the prisoner Broadbent turned suddenly pale, and exhibited much perturbation of mind.

Brushing into the court with a sort of habitual who-cares-for-anybody air, and giving his friend "Hopper" a nod of recognition, as much as to say, "Heaw arta, owd lad?" the witness placed himself, unbidden *on* the witness-box, and hung his cap on a staff which a policeman standing near him held up as

a show of authority. The appearance of this witness caused some little animation on the bench. Even the usually somnolent Mr. Woodpate exhibited signs of being awake, and Mr. Dewdrop, who had hitherto employed himself in making a number of tooth-picks out of a quill, gave up his vocation, and, putting his hands in his pockets, assumed an intensely profound and searching look.

"Well, what have you got to say?" demanded Mr. Goodear, seeing that the witness was glancing round with a degree of complacency in his looks that showed he was quite at ease.

"Aw dunno know ut aw've so mich of owt," replied Bumper, carelessly, "bo what aw do say 'll be to the poynt."

"Do you know the prisoners?"

"Ay; yo' may put that deawn as a sartinty, at ony rate."

"You know them both?"

"Aw knew Harry Andrey when he're nobo th' height o' this little chap here (pointing to the junior clerk, who reddened very much, and tried to look taller than he really was); an' Hopper an me han fowten battles t'gether till we could hardly live beawt a threshin'."

"Were you ever in bad company with the latter prisoner?"

"Noan so mich wurr nor ussel."

"Were you in each other's company on the night of the 25th."

"When wur that, for aw've forgotten owt abeawt th' almenek ?"

"On Christmas night."

"Ay, we wur."

"At what place ?"

"At th' bottom o' th' Well Lone. We'd a bit of a tussel t'gether for t' keep ussels warm."

"Had Broadbent anything with him ?"

"Ay, he'd a pair o' shoon ut leet i' mi ribs every time ut aw thrut him ; aw feel th' punses neaw."

"Well, but had he nothing beside ?"

"Neaw, aw'll just tell yo' o abeawt it as straight as if yo'd read it eawt o' *Bell's Life*. Aw'd bin to a foowt bo' [foot ball] playin' i' Waverlow, for two peck o' drink an' a pottato pie, an' aw're gooin whoam as straight as aw could. When aw geet to th' Well Lone Bridge aw see'd summit comin' deawn th' bruck, an' as aw thowt it wur a boggart, an' they'd bin so scarce ever sin th' railroad wur made, aw'd have a bit o' spooart with it. So aw crope by th' hedge side an' waitut for it to come up. 'Hallo, Bumper, is that thee?' th' boggart sed. 'Ay,' aw sed, 'it is : is that thee, Hopper ?' 'Ay,' he said, 'bo just thee husht, or else theaw goes 'ith bruck.' 'Theaw'l noa put me in,' aw sed ; so we went at it an fowt till we'd booath on us had enoof. Aw noticed ut he'd a wallet on his shoother, an' as aw knew it wur th' wrung day for bearin whoam, aw axt him what he'd gotten in it. Well, he sed, if aw'd keep dark, an' help him t' spend th' brass, he'd tell me. 'Hast bin up to some o' thi

owd tricks agen?' aw sed; 'cose if theaw has, aw'm noane gooin' t' poo i'th same wagin as thee, aw cón tell thi.' 'Oh,' he sed, 'it's nobbo *owd hoyron*: so its noane stalin."

"What is *old iron*?" asked the chairman of the bench.

"Well, yo' seen," said Bumper, who happened to be by trade a bricklayer, "it's same as if aw're buildin' yo a heause, an' every neet when aw went whoam aw took a breeck or two wi' me for t' build a pig-cote. That wouldno be *stealin*; it ud be takkin 'em as one's own, an that's co'ed makkin *owd hoyron*."

"But the prisoner hadn't his walletfull of bricks?"

"Nawe, bo he'd a lot o' silk an' stuff, ut he sed he could mak' a peawnd or two on, an' aw met goo wax at it if aw'd sing smo'; bo if aw split he'd gie me abeawt three inches of an owd garden knife ut he aulus carried in his pocket, an' see heaw aw should like that."

A murmur here went through the court, which the officers had some difficulty in suppressing.

"Remember, you're upon your oath," said Mr. Lewis, though he was far from wishing to intimidate the witness.

"Aw know," replied Bumper; "aw've sed nowt nobbo what aw'd swear upo' a bigger book nor *that*, an' stick to mi sed-so same as a woman would when hoo's threeapin [falling out], new then."

"Have you any questions to ask this witness, Broadbent." asked the chairman.

"Nawe," growled the prisoner; "aw'st saddle wi' him sometime else."

"Have you anything to say why we should not commit you to the New Bailey to take your trial at the next sessions?"

"Nawe," said the prisoner, "bo aw con tell yo' one thing, *aw shanno goo by misel.*"

"May I ask a remand on behalf of Broadbent," said Mr. Lewis, rising hastily and speaking excitedly. "He has just handed me a note, the contents of which I do not wish to make known, but which may tend to implicate others, as yet unsuspected, in this affair."

The magistrates put their heads together for about a minute, and conferred in whispers. The chairman afterwards announced that the prisoner Broadbent would be remanded until the Monday following, and that the further investigation of the case, so far as it affected Andrew, would be proceeded with. Broadbent was hereupon removed, and the clerk called "Joseph Clough."

With a look straight at the remaining prisoner, and giving three or four coughs that brought water into his eyes, Old Joe-o'-Dick's stumbled his way to the little platform occupied by the previous witnesses.

"Wipe your eyes, Joseph," whispered Mr. Hartley, slightly raising himself from his seat.

"Ay, well, bless yo', Aaron; bo it's cowl yondher," said Joe, producing the doll's apron from his hat, and applying it successively to each corner of both eyes. "Heigh, heigh, heigh!"

"The evidence you shall give, &c.," said the clerk, handing Joe the book.

"Ay, ay, aw understond," said Joe. "Aw did it oncet when Smobeart wur had up for sellin' hush [selling beer without licence], an' th' policeman we had then swore he'd tasted th' ale, which wur mooar nor ever anybody else had, for it had no taste ~~abawt~~ it."

"You come to give evidence on behalf of the prisoner Andrew, I understand," said the chairman, after a very short conference with the clerk.

"If yo'n lemmi," said Joe.

"Proceed."

"Aw reckon aw'st do him no hurt if aw say nowt agen him."

"We should think not."

"Well, then," the witness proceeded, "aw've known Harry theere ever sin he're a little babby. It wur thowt oncet ut he'd never be reart, he're so forrud, an' so good, an' so pratty. Aw've bowt every curl off his yed monny a time o'er wi' hawpennies ut aw've gan him; bo when he'd browt mi th' sithurs [scissors] fort' cut 'em off, aw patted his yed an' tow'd him t' save 'em for his little sweetheart. He never marblet, nor toss't wi' buttons same as other lads, bo uset t' sit i'th' nook wi a book on his knee ut had picthurs o' fairies an' giants in it; an' as he geet owder he saved up his hawpennies, an' bowt bigger books ut nob'dy else has noane like 'em i' o' Langley-side, till he geet so far larnt ut th' skoomesthur could

taich him nowt. Th' last words ut his feythur sed to me when he lee on his deeach-bed wur, 'Joe, tak' care o' eawr Harry. Let him stick to his larnin', an dunno let him get into bad company.' Aw promist him aw would, an' then he dee'd wi' as pratty a smile on his face as ever yo' see'd a young woman wi' at a weddin'. That lad's his feyther to o'th' woald. He wouldno' tak' a pin eawt of an owd coot collar if he knew it wurno' his own. He wouldno' pluck a fleawer eawt of a garden hedge, if it wurno one o' God's fleawers ut belong to onybody; an' as for brakin' into a wareheawse, an' stalin' owt eawt on't, if he could ha' done that beawt droppin' i' pieces like a cheese full o' maggots, aw should believe then ut ther no judgment i' heaven, an' ut God o' Meety had livert us up for t' pow-fag one another to o' eternity. Neaw then, aw've done."

"No evidence at all," observed Mr. Dewdrop.

"Quite ir-irrelevant," said Mr. Woodpate.

"But an eloquent pleading," said Mr. Goodear, "and he must be insensible indeed that could resist its force. Are there any other witnesses?"

"No," replied the clerk.

Mr. Goodear, took off his spectacles, and, after passing them several times through his hands, addressed himself to the prisoner.

"Henry Andrew," he said, looking earnestly at the ceiling, "have you anything to say in reply to the charges laid against you. Take your time, don't be in a hurry."

The prisoner hung down his head, drew his hand a time or two along the dock-rail, then burst into tears.

Mr. Lewis here rose, and with an expression in the manner in which he placed his right foot on the chair, and balanced his body over the table, that arrested and fixed the attention of the whole court, said—

“It would be useless attempting to prove by any evidence which could be produced that the prisoner, my client, was not on Mr. Hartley’s premises during the very time that the robbery took place. In the absence of any explanations respecting his motives for visiting the ‘Hillock’ at such a time, and under such circumstances as have been detailed, his presence there at the time can only be regarded with suspicion. This I must allow. But are there not motives and desires, besides such as are of a criminal nature, that we may wish to conceal from the world, and which sooner than proclaim to the public ear we would submit to insult, to contumely, nay hazard even liberty itself? The prisoner is in the blush of manhood. Endowed by nature with delicate susceptibilities, trained from infancy to regard his lowly position as one to be embellished and ennobled by a life of virtue, rather than as one that he should aspire beyond for the allurements of wealth and rank, he has spent a youth so purely devoted to doing good to his kind—so devoid of the spirit of self-seeking, as to have become the idol of every fireside—

a being against whom villany would not lift its hand, even to absolve itself from the imputation of crime.

“But who can control, or guide the affections? Who can say—I will not love above my own sphere? Who can withhold their worship of loveliness, whether seen in the cottage or the palace? The prisoner is human; but he was enamoured of goodness as well as beauty. Frequently brought into the presence of both, how should he resist their united influence, when ripening daily towards that stage of our existence that we regard as the hey-day of life? Henry Andrew loved. It was love that sent him on his errands of charity, though he knew it not. It was love that made his home a palace—his life a romance: that peopled his native village with brothers and sisters, whom he gathered round his heart to glorify the image that reigned within. This love grew to a passion, as might be expected. Circumstances connected with this Christmas time favoured its growth, and it must either be reciprocated, or the heart, consuming in its own fire, must seek peace and forgetfulness elsewhere. I need not say whom the prisoner loved; but it was the despair of one who, when he has discovered his passion, and deemed it fixed too high ever to be returned—that took him to the ‘Hillock’ on the evening of the robbery. He went to look farewell, not to say it; to feel once more in the presence of his soul’s idol, then bury himself in his home until the frost of age would chill the current of his feelings, and restore peace to a heart that might never know another affection.

"I have said sufficient, I believe, to convince you that the prisoner's errand was not of a criminal nature; that it was prompted by one of the least selfish motives that exist in the human breast; and, if that be your conviction, you are bound at once to declare the prisoner discharged—free from all taint that could prejudice the glorious future which I hope he has before him."

Mr. Lewis concluded with this grandiloquent appeal to the hearts and understandings of the bench; and, as he sat down, the bright eyes that twinkled round the court might have been taken as an augury of what the magistrates' decision would be.

"I need not ask you," said the chairman; "nor you," turning alternately to each of his coadjutors, both of whom nodded an approval of what Mr. Goodear *might* have said, as could be inferred from their looks.

"I see you are of my opinion. Henry Andrew," he said, turning towards the prisoner, "you are discharged. God bless you, and guard you from wicked ways!"

What an huzza rang through the court—the policemen rather encouraging the demonstration than endeavouring to suppress it. Joe-o'-Dick's crowed with the hoarseness of an old farmyard cock that has got the "blacks;" and the lungs of a certain old hunter, who stood like a clock-case in one corner, might have been heard ringing above the varied acclamations that resounded through the building.

Mr. Hartley shook hands with Mr. Lewis over and over again ; then, in company with George Watson and the servant, hastened out of court, and sought his carriage. Somehow he seemed to avoid Harry Andrew, for he never once looked towards him during the time Mr. Lewis was addressing the bench. When he arrived at home, he fell upon his daughter's neck, and wept like a child.

CHAPTER XI.

It was early morning—the morning after a severe winter night. The stars were of that intense brightness that indicates a clear, sharp, frosty air, and the silence that prevailed in the streets of Birchwood was such that had you stood in the Market Place you might occasionally have heard a multitude of clocks tinkling the hour in as many varied tones. The loud lazy tongue of St. Swid's would be joining anywhere in this chorus; allowing little Swiss clocks to put in their merry strokes, and rattle through the hour with a disregard to time and harmony that left the old bell twanging its bass long after the busier ones had finished. It was such a morning as makes a light look cheerful wherever seen, through the rents of old shawls pinned over cellar windows, through the curtainless slits of a garret, or where it glares from mid-street fires lighted to indicate the disordered pavement consequent on dangerous excavations. It was such a morning as induces policemen to become benefactors to certain classes of the public—locking up the homeless found in doorways and entries, and opening their lamps for the early workman to light his short black pipe, and remind his benumbed fingers of the comforts

of a good fire at home. The stillness in the midhour was death-like ; but the time was approaching when there would be a stir in some of the streets. The next time the chorus of clocks disturbed the fitful sleeper crouching before the street fire, some signs of animation would be presented in the form of closely shawled and scantily jacketed figures, making long shadows under the lamps, and awakening echoes with their iron-shod clogs that are never heard during the day.

When this hour had arrived some insane specimen of a time-teller made a mockery of its race by striking *ten*—taking a very brief pause—and going off with *five* more to make up *fifteen*. Another, with a greater regard for truth, told *six* ; and a third, more easily satisfied, but quite wide of the mark, was content with *one*, as if it scorned to be as garrulous as some of its neighbours. The church clock, however, setting an example to the rest, struck *five*, and immediately there commenced a rattling against bedroom windows that a stranger might have accounted to be a species of castanet serenading peculiar to the locality, but very objectionable to people who love their beds, as may be inferred from the growls which in some instances respond to these early salutations. That useful, but to some people mysterious individual, the “knocker up” was commencing his rounds ; gliding like a phantom from house to house, from street to street, and plying his rod to arouse the slumbering toiler, who is perhaps dreaming of “the festive and

and the joyous dance" of some merry evening to come, in happy unconsciousness of the many engine boilers that are then getting up steam for work.

About this hour, and along a narrow unpaved street, lighted only by one lamp projecting from a sombre dead wall, a shadow or two might now and then be seen flitting to and fro—sometimes in groups, and at other times, solitarily and silently stealing out of the light and into the gloom beyond. This street was one of those repulsive-looking thoroughfares that are formed mostly of blank walls, apparently girded together here and there by straps, iron shafts, and crooked, leaky steampipes that crack and hiss and impel the alarmed passenger onwards into the darkness. About half-way down this street frowned a spacious gateway, beyond which the yet unlighted windows of a moderate sized factory looked coldly and blankly over the way, and a very black chimney caused the stars to be hidden from view by the dense cloud of smoke which it continually vomited forth. The gates of this establishment were yet closed; but a small wicket door was open, and through the narrow space a solitary candle sent its feeble ray whenever it could be prevailed upon to burn. This candle was stuck on a bracket formed out of a lump of mortar pasted against the wall, and beneath it were grouped, or huddled together, about a score of people, assembled there for a purpose that will shortly appear.

These people were mostly from the country, and had come three, four, and five miles that morning to

get an early turn for the business they were upon, that they might have some chance of returning home before the following midnight. There were old people of both sexes amongst these—gray, asthmatical, and weak from long fasting, with very thin clothes to protect them from the raw air of that morning. Very small girls and smaller boys mingled in the group, or jumped and romped with each other to prevent their young blood from being chilled; but it cannot be said that they were merry, as not a cheerful expression escaped their lips; and to those who knew their errand, and the poverty of the homes they had left at that unseasonable hour and that inclement time, it would be no wonder, since even youth has limits to its lightheartedness, and starvation is but a poor stimulant to fun and merriment. The most numerous class assembled here were, however, middle-aged people—fathers and mothers who had left children at home scantily provided for, and anxiously waiting for their return. These complained bitterly of their lot, and wondered if it was essential to the prosperity and happiness of a nation that they should thus be doomed to work and starve—starve and work from year to year without one ray of hope to light them to a more promising future. Some of these had not been in bed of all night, being afraid of sleeping too long, and consequently losing an early turn at the end of their journey, which would probably entail other evils, such as being deprived of work, or being compelled to pass a whole long day away from home, where their return was so eagerly looked for.

They were handloom weavers, these people, on "bearing home," or fetching work errands; and were waiting for the engine-driver to admit them to the proper waiting-room, there to bide the three hours that must intervene before "Messrs. Whiffle and Sloper" (who had amalgamated their concerns) commenced "fitting."

Leaning solitarily against a stone projection in the gateway, and the farthest removed from the light of the candle, stood an individual who, although he wore the indispensable white apron of a weaver, appeared to be more warmly clothed than his fellows; and who, whenever he spoke, made such a mixture of several vernaculars, that many wondered if he was a stranger from Coventry or Spitalfields, and was come there to seek work. This person was more cheerful than the rest, and joked occasionally about the frost, and the snow, and the candle, which he appeared to regard as very good substitutes for a warm breakfast. What was thought most singular, he had never inquired his turn, seeming indifferent as to whether he should be "fitted" that day or the day following; and as others kept dropping in, and invariably putting the question, "Whoa do I follow?" with an eagerness that showed the inquiry to be of some moment, he appeared not the least alarmed at the prospect of being left to the last.

There was a desire on the part of some to cultivate a further acquaintance with the stranger, which desire was propitiated in no small degree by his offering a

well-stocked tobacco box for the use of such as smoked, and even inviting their preliminary acquaintance with a flask of something which tasted very much like brandy. At length one of the group, emboldened by these advances, ventured to question him as to the business he was about.

"Are yo' bearin' whoam, or seechin' wark?" was the question put by this individual, who happened to be no other than Joe-o'-Dick's son Sam, or "Sam-o'-Joe's," as he was mostly called by his neighbours.

"I'm seekin' wark," was the reply.

"Aw'm feeart yo're at th' wrung shop," observed Sam; "beawt yo're noane partikilar to a reed o' chep-trip, or touch-un-go,* an' yo' couldno' fill that bottle so oft eawt o' what yo' could get wi' thoose."

"Nawe, nor he couldno' fill his crop so oft, nonther; beawt he took a good deel o' wynt in;" observed a bystander, who had probably feasted on little of aught beside wind that morning.

"I hope to get a reed of a new sort—satin or somethin'," was the stranger's reply; but this declaration being received with such a doubtful laugh, he was afraid he had committed himself in some way.

"If yo're thinkin' at axin for a satin," observed Sam-o'-Joe's, placing a strong emphasis on the last word, "yo'd betther get yor face case-hardent, for Sloper 'll be ready t' send his fist agen it for axin sich a needless question as that."

* Familiar names given to coarse, ill-paid kinds of work.

The stranger smiled, but without looking confused, and jokingly hinted that he might be more successful than they supposed.

"Wheay," said Sam, "aw dunno' think just meet neaw ut they'n as mich gradely silk i'th' place as ud mak a good stiff, smoot satin. They had uset t' ha' mixed a bit wi' cotton ; bo neaw it's so mich cotton an' so mich nowt, an' checked i'th' same fashin."

"Well, we'n wait an' see," said the other in a very confident tone, and smiling with half disguised contempt at his interrogator.

"Yo're happen one o' thoose ut stonds treat for putters-eawt an' mesthurs when yo' leeten on 'em," said the latter, turning on his heel, as if he had made up his mind to despise the stranger, supposing him to be guilty of such illegitimate means of keeping in favour with employers.

"If aw could no' get wark beawt creepin' up a mesthur's sleeve, aw'd dee upo' th' fust hess-middin ut aw coom to," exclaimed another in a very determined and impressive manner. "God knows aw've bin clemmed wurr nor wedgwood, bo' aw hanno' comn to rubbin mi becart agen nob'dys ears yet ; an' another thing, aw never shall. That yo' may put onto mi ticket as th' reet keawnt an' weight, an' aw'll stond to it like a mon."

Whilst the applause that followed this declaration was going on, the bolt was shot of a narrow door approached by a small flight of flimsily-constructed wooden steps, and the warmer atmosphere of the

interior of the building was instantly sought by the almost frozen crowd. Stairs above stairs were climbed, the whole passage being as dark as a dungeon, and strongly pregnant with the odour of decaying rubbish heaped in corners at each landing. These passages traversed, a narrow, ill-ventilated waiting room was gained, fitted up with rude forms, and lighted during the day time by a small and very dirty window. It was now lighted with gas, and presented a much more cheerful appearance than it would when daylight was supposed to arrive. In this room, or lobby, the assembly of weavers and weavers' children sat and waited the coming of nine o'clock—waited with that patient resignation that only custom and privation could inure them to, and which they now appeared to regard as a matter of no great consequence. The three hours would be got over, and so would long weeks and months and years; so would life. What did it matter?

The dawn at last broke dimly through the window, the gas went out, and how much colder it grew as the light increased and restored the outlines of the blank faces ranged around! Presently a bell in the "putting-out" room was heard to give one ding, and this being regarded as an announcement that either Mr. Whiffle or Mr. Sloper, or both, had arrived, a little animation became perceptible in the lobby, and two of the first in turn to be fitted got up from their seats and proceeded to shoulder the door communicating with the other room.

"First two with work!" was called out in a sharp, snapping voice, as though it had been struck from a whip, and was intended to lacerate those to whom the call was addressed.

The two at the door hereupon entered the "putting-out" room, and a third peeped in, who was immediately requested to close the door, in a similar snapping tone to that heard before.

"Sloper's in a divul of a temper this mornin'," remarked the person whose physiognomy had called forth the latter injunction from the "putting-out" room.

"Then he'll do some batin' [deducting from wages] to-day," observed another, gathering his auguries of the future from experience of the past. "He'll mak' his Kesmus brass eawt on us; mind if he doesno."

The two might have been further from the truth. Sloper was in a bad temper, and inclined to deal harshly with his workpeople.

"Too light, too light by a pound! A mere rag, a mere rag! Can't sell such goods as these!" were the several exclamations with which the manufacturer commenced overhauling a piece of work presented by the first weaver. "What's your money?"

"Eight shillin'," the weaver answered, with a strong presentiment in his mind that it would have to be reduced.

"Make his ticket out for seven, Samuel; a shilling off for being too thin;" and with this method of settling differences in the quality of work, Sloper

flung the worthless out to the end of the counter, and demanded what the other weaver had been doing so long over his work, protesting that it would not be worth a——something, through the time for the order to be completed having expired.

"Stop a bit," said the first weaver; "yo' sen that cut o' mine is a peawnd too leet. Mi last cut wur too heavy, an' ther isno' a hank o' weft o' difference between th' two. Heaw can aw do reet?"

"Have you made out his ticket, Samuel?"

"Yes," replied the bookkeeper.

"Next work," sung out the manufacturer.

"A deead robbery!" exclaimed the weaver.

"A what?" said Sloper, turning sharply round.

"A deead robbery," repeated the other, warmly.

"Come," said the astonished manufacturer, reddening up considerably, "if you don't mind I'll have you sent to keep company with Hopper. I shouldn't wonder just now if you hav'n't many a hank of weft at home that you should have returned. So mind what you say about robbery, or you may find yourself on the wrong side of the lockup door before you expect it."

"Yo're likely t' be theere afore me if yo' carryn on mich longer o' that plan," retorted the weaver, making his exit as he said it.

"Next work!" thundered Sloper. "Let me see," said he, addressing the weaver already in process of being fitted. "You've had this out three days over time. What do you call your money?"

"What dun *yo* co it?" asked the weaver.

"Your *full* money, I mean," said the other, with the faintest possible smile upon his coarse face.

"Twelve an' sixpence!"

"Make his ticket out for eleven shillings, Samuel; eighteen-pence off for having work out too long. Next!"

The "next" came in, and the next after him, and it continued to be the next and the next, until the stranger before mentioned thought it was his turn to be fitted. Without as much as saying "by your leave," he squeezed himself in at the door, raising a clamour behind him through what was considered an unfair proceeding.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Sloper of the new comer, as he stood with his thumbs inserted in his waistcoat pockets, and his back leaned against the counter.

"I've come to see if yov aught to let eawt," was the stranger's reply.

"Come in again in the afternoon; can't attend to you now," said Sloper, seizing the yard stick, and inflicting a cut on an imaginary back.

"Well, but—"

"Next work!"

"I've a pattern here that'll perhaps be worth something to you," urged the stranger, taking a paper out of his hat, and handing it to the manufacturer, who hummed a snatch of song as he opened it.

"A pattern, eh! Stolen, perhaps; hum-hum-hum—tooral-i-day."

Suddenly the humming ceased, the hand that held the paper began to tremble, and a dead paleness spread over the face of the manufacturer.

"That's your next work," said the stranger, giving a meaning wink at the other weaver; "and the sooner you *fit* it the better."

"Come this way, if you please," said Sloper, in a very subdued and tremulous voice, "I don't understand this business."

"That business means," said the other, "that you're suspected of having some stolen silk in your possession, and that is my warrant to search the premises. If you'll oblige me with your company I'll proceed at once."

"But what authority have you beside this? It may be a hoax."

"It would be well for you if it were a hoax; but to convince you that it is genuine, and in right down good earnest, I can tell you that I'm seldom employed in any but the most serious cases. I'm Inspector Dutton, of the borough police, and not a weaver, as you might suppose."

"You will, perhaps, excuse me going over with you, as I have a great deal of work to fit, and my partner is out of town," said the manufacturer, after a pause.

"It would be slightly inconvenient, I'm afraid," returned the inspector, pretending to consider the matter over, with a view to being as obliging as possible, "I must have you with me."

"Wouldn't the bookkeeper do as well?"

"No; I shall want that young gentleman to stay just where he is, and not budge one inch. I shall require ~~you~~ to see to that in the Queen's name," said the inspector, turning to the weaver near him, who happened to be Sam-o'-Joe's.

"Oh, aw'll see ut he doesno' brake his neck wi' runnin' afther yo'," returned Sam, with a most assuring grin upon his countenance.

"Well, then, to business at once," said the inspector, wrapping his white apron round his loins; a process which afforded some amusement to his newly installed assistant. "Come, Mr. Sloper, we'll just look round the next room."

"There's nothing *there*," said Mr. Sloper, "except some old cards and gears, nothing, upon my word."

"Well, we'll see," and the inspector disappeared through the doorway, beckoning the manufacturer, who followed with a very reluctant step.

No sooner had the two made their exit than Sam-o'-Joe's scrambled over the counter, and, sauntering up the room, collared the bookkeeper, giving that young gentleman at the time an intimation that he, Sam, was his superior, by a very slight shake that made him reel from his stool.

"Sithi," said Sam, "if it wurno' for havin' th' advantage o'er thi, aw'd just messur thi back wi' that yardstick, for th' impidence theaw used toart mi last time aw're here. Dunno' do it agen; ift' does aw'll shake thi shoon off thi feet, theaw young whelp!"

Leaving Sam and his charge to compromise their differences as best they could, we will follow Messrs. Dutton and Sloper through the course of their investigations in the adjoining room.

"I do not suppose," said the inspector, directing the light from a "bull's-eye" round the sombre and dusty room, "that you hav'n't taken such precautions as you might think necessary to prevent a discovery of the stolen property. But, happily for the ends of justice, thieves are not always honourable to each other. Would you please to hold this lamp."

Handing his companion the lamp, the inspector took from his coat pocket a strong screw-driver and inserting it into a nick in the boarded floor, gave a powerful wrench which sprang a board from its position, and disclosed a spacious cavity beneath.

Sloper let the lamp fall, but whether intentionally or from the emotion he felt at the time is uncertain. Down, however, it fell, and out went the light. But if the act was wilful on the part of the manufacturer, and intended to serve a strategic purpose, it was a failure; for, after groping about a short time in the cavity beneath the floor, the inspector laid hold of something, and, holding it up to the dim light of the window, demanded of the trembling Sloper what it was doing there.

The something produced was a bundle of dyed silk, apparently fresh from the dyer's hands, weighing several pounds; and, as the crest-fallen manufacturer eyed it askance, he faltered out, in abashed

explanation, that they sometimes put silk there to prevent it getting too dry.

"A strange place, too, for such a purpose," observed the inspector, striking a match and re-lighting the lamp. "Probably this isn't all that you have secured against the extreme *heat* and dryness of the weather. Let's look a little further."

So saying, he directed the bull's-eye along the extent of the cavity, for further exploration, taking care that he had half an eye on the movements of his companion, lest that individual should manifest a disposition to try something foul upon him. Waving the light to and fro, the inspector at length perceived something shining with a dullish glitter at the further end of the hole; and, hastening thither, drew from their hiding-place three large unvarnished tin bobbins, each completely filled with coloured tram silk. The bobbins were stamped on the ends with the initials "A. H." which nobody would suppose to stand for "Whiffle and Sloper," because belonging to the wrong end of the alphabet.

"I suppose these were to be kept moist as well as the other," observed the officer, sarcastically. "The profits of your business must be nicely balanced indeed, if it requires such exceedingly careful precautions. Is there no ticket belonging to that bundle?"

"No; we require none. We know the quality by the weight."

"An unusual practice, I believe; but we'll see." And, thrusting his hand into the heart of the bundle,

and searching about amongst the twisted skeins, the inspector pounced upon a label, the exact duplicate of one he possessed, and on which was written—

324

243. B

14oz. Dk Blk org

A. Hartley.

‘ Mr. Sloper,’ said the officer, in a professional tone, which had not the slightest tendency towards lessening the alarm which the manufacturer felt, ‘ I shall require your attendance at the police office.’

‘ Will it do when I’ve fitted the weavers?’ inquired Sloper, at the same time doubting very much if it would.

‘ Not exactly,’ replied the inspector. ‘ In other words I might have said—you’re my prisoner ; only I did not wish to do it offensively. If you have any arrangements to make with your servants, I shall give you time. But you must go with me. Where is Mr. Whiffle?’

‘ He’s been out of town these ten days.’

‘ Are you sure?’

‘ Quite sure.’

‘ Then possibly he may not have been engaged in this transaction.’

Mr. Sloper was silent, but inclined his head, as if intimating that, whatever might be the transaction the other meant, his partner certainly had taken no part in it.

The two now adjourned to the putting out room, where they found Mr. Whiffle, who had arrived about five minutes before, engaged in an altercation with Sam-o'-Joe's touching the latter's right to be on the wrong side of the counter, which was maintained on the part of Sam with a vigorous perseverance that completely took Mr. Whiffle's breath. Explanations, however, being made by the inspector, the senior partner in the firm assumed the duties which his steadjutor had been obliged to relinquish, and the latter was marched off, a prisoner to the police station.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT a welcome there was for Harry Andrew on reaching home after his release from custody! All Langley-side was having a second Christmas, because rejoicing was so congenial. The "Pig and Fork" never was so noisy; taproom, kitchen, parlour, vied with each other in a determination to be demonstrative and social. Everybody was a "good chap," virtues being discovered in people who were not known to possess any before, and well-proved good qualities in others being so exalted as to make the company assembled quite a model of honesty and good nature. "Daf," the landlord, forgot to receive payment for about one-half the drink he served, and "Susy," his wife, was in such a "way" as to be entirely at her wits' end to make out whether toasted cheese should be done in the oven or put in the kettle. Old Joe-o'-Dick's was king of the taproom, drinking with one then with another, and shaking every loose hand that he could find. He was younger by many a year than his son Sam, as could be proved at once by a "dust" at either running, jumping, or wrestling; and as for singing, why he could do "The Little Drummer Boy" so as nobody could tell but he was leading up a

M

regiment. Lung Yeb, too, was in "high feather," and had given so many "tally-ho's" up the chimney as might cause people in the village to imagine there was a "neet hunt" afoot. He had called to see Mally-o'-Bob's that evening, and obtained an assurance from that engaging damsel that he might hang his hat up behind the door any time he liked ; so that he was rejoicing from two causes. Even Bumper was social, only having fought once since his appearance in the witness-box, and that battle being provoked by a person (who was in such favour with Whiffle and Sloper that he could have work when other people were waiting) remarking that Aaron Hartley was an "owd file," and Harry Andrew a "lick-spittle," neither of which terms could be swallowed by the doughty bricklayer, so he had pummelled the obnoxious fellow to his heart's content, as a farewell bit of championship.

At Widow Andrew's cottage there was a little scene. Harry's homeward journey had been so protracted by the many calls he had to make upon people who would know all about the morning's proceedings from his own lips, and had waylaid him on purpose, that it was far in the afternoon when he turned into the well-known and once happily trodden path that led to his mother's cottage.

It was dusk, and there was a light—a cheerful, rosy firelight—reddening the very window, and dancing on the walls with such fairy-like gambols, that Harry's heart leapt with its old bound as he

contemplated the welcome picture. He would not have the pleasure of giving his mother a surprise, as she must have heard, hours ago, how his examination had terminated ; but he should see her old face again as bright and cheerful as the light which met him at the door, and that was all he cared for just then. He put his hand to the latch, and the next moment he stood on the hearthstone with his arms clasping a wrinkled bedgown, and a loving hand passing itself through his hair, as if it was feeling whether his curls were still the same.

“Moather,” said the youth, flinging his hat on the drawers, “aw’m here agen.”

“Ay,” said the dame, “bo why didno’ theaw come sooner, theaw pousement ? Here aw’ve bin watching for thi ever sin’ afore dinner time, when owd Joe-o’-Dick’s coom whoam, wondherin an’ wondherin heaw theaw’d gone on, an’ what wur come on thi.”

“Eh, moather, yo’ knew o’ abeawt it lung sin’,” said Harry, giving the bedgown another squeeze.

“To be sure aw did ; bo aw mut nor ha’ known it if they’d o’ bin like thee. Bo go th’ ways back agen ; aw con do beawt thi ;” and Widow Andrew, instead of showing her son the door, smoothed the pillow of her rocking-chair, and forced the naughty boy to seat himself in it.

“Neaw, Harry, tell mi o’ abeawt it—heaw theaw’s gone on, and mooar beside,” said the dame eagerly ; although she had had at least a dozen versions of the affair before all very faithfully detailed.

Harry, to humour his parent, set to at once and gave her a very modest account of the examination, making as few comments as possible, much to the disappointment of his listener, who complained that he had "laft hissel eawt."

"Bo' moather," said Harry, when he had finished his story, "what's.o' this good stuff doin' on th' table? Where's it come fro?"

"Eh, ay, Harry, neaw then. Just gex that!" exclaimed the old woman, looking admiringly at what had caught her son's attention.

Harry might well put the question, for the table was spread as if for a prince; and had been so several hours, waiting for his appearance. And although he did not insist upon knowing where the good things had come from, being content with making a very rude guess; nevertheless, the dame spoke as if he did, and framed her explanations accordingly.

"A angel coom this mornin', Harry, deawn fro' heaven, aw'm sure; for ther's nowt so pratty here; and hoo'd a basket wi' hur, filled so full ut th' lid wouldno' shut; an' hoo emptied it o eawt upo' th' table, as theaw sees. Aw wanted to send it o' to thee, bo hoo sed theaw had plenty, an' ut theaw'd friends, which aw'm sure theaw has, or theaw met nor ha' poo'd through as weel as theaw has done; for sometimes th' innicent are kest into prison, an' stoned, an' brunt, un' hanged, same as thi feyther ust read abeawt i' Sam Baimfort's book. Hoo stopt an' had hur tae wi' me, an' hoo did so talk abeawt thee,

Harry, that hoo did. Aw think aw axt hur whoa hoo wur, bo hoo would no' tell mi ; an' when hoo went away, hoo went so quiet ; as quiet as someb'y ut wur deein', wi' ther een turnt up toart heaven, an' sayin Lord Jesus wur waitin' for 'em. Eh, Harry, aw wisht theaw'd seen hur."

"Heaw wur hoo donned, moather?" asked the son, his thoughts running on the "Hillock" and its now thrice dear residents.

"I silver an' gowd ; what else dost think?" replied the dame, with a most womanly disposition to exaggerate everything. "Hoo'd a bonnet wi' a red fither in it, an a cloak, nicer bi monny a time nor that ut thi feyther took me to th' church in, an' which aw have neaw lapt up i' thoose drawers, as good as ever it wur. Eh, bless hur ! for o' these good things, an' for thinkin' abeawt a poor lone widow, an hur poor lad ut wur so nee bein' takken away fro me. God bless hur ! an' may hoo have a husbant as good as hursel ;—summut like thi feyther, Harry, ut ther noane sich like nowhere, nor never will be agen."

Harry laïd his head upon his knee, and covered his face with his hands. He had divined early who his mother's lady visitor was, and now the description of her habit confirmed his conjectures. Who could it be but Miss Hartley, since there was no other lady that he knew answering the description his parent had given. And now came a flood of recollections,—painful and overpowering. The first dawn of his passion ; the rapture it brought ; his subsequent

misery ; the wrestlings he had had with his heart ; its obduracy ; the promise he had made to George Watson, to leave his home and country until time and absence should place, perhaps for ever, a barrier betwixt himself and the object of his love ; all these crowded at once upon his memory, so that he heeded but little the tender motherly invitation to partake of the delicious viands set before him, but continued to sit like one wrapt in a troubled reverie from which he cared not to awaken.

Harry might have sat long thus pondering had not his mother heard a knock at the door, and called his attention to it.

"Come in," said Widow Andrew, judging by the peculiarity of the knock that it had been given by some neighbour.

Opening the door with some difficulty from the latch being almost out of reach, a little boy entered, breathless, apparently with running, and who exhibited a sixpence which he held in jealous care, and said that a gentleman had given it him to come and tell "Harry Andrey" that he was wanted at the "Pig and Fork." The gentleman's name was "George," he said ; from which it appeared to Harry that an interview was desired on the part of Mr. Watson, to which he readily, but with some misgiving as to its import, assented. Reaching his hat from the drawers, and assuring his mother he would be back in a "two-thri minits," Harry took the boy's hand and stepped down to the "Pig and Fork."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE interview between George Watson and Harry Andrew at the "Pig and Fork," so far as it affected the views and destinies of both, was of deep and trying moment. The former's frankness and good nature, so strongly manifested during their previous interview; the interest he had shown in the proceedings of that morning; his kindness towards all with whom he had been brought in contact, had ennobled him in the estimation of the latter and presented his motives in so pure and disinterested a light, that to a simple, honest, single-hearted fellow, like Harry Andrew, the least idea of their being prompted by selfishness would never have occurred. It is a question if even George himself had placed other than a generous construction on the steps he had proposed to take; whether in the largeness of his heart he had not so balanced the advantages in favour of his friend as to give them a decided preponderance over his own. What had Harry to hope from an opposite course? What chances were there of one so humble as he being so romantically fortunate as to win the affections of a beautiful and highly gifted lady, even with a fair opportunity for prosecuting his suit? None, George Watson reasoned

but the more he tried to convince himself that there was no necessity for his removing a possible rival out of the way, the more his heart became distrustful ; and he would resolve again and again, at whatever cost, at whatever sacrifice of conscience, to take the only safe course his ingenuity could devise. It was for this purpose he had sought the present interview, where it soon became evident how wealth and patronage bestowed with an apparent kindness of heart will influence a disposition that has never before had occasion to look suspectingly on the motives of mankind.

On Harry's presenting himself at the bar of the "Pig and Fork," he was instantly surrounded by a crowd of admirers and sympathisers, who appeared to think that the most forcible way of proving their good feeling towards the young man would be to make a barrel of him, wherein to deposit the contents of some dozen pint pots that were held out for his acceptance. These, however, Harry declined (not being accustomed to the fashionable and expensive pastime of drinking), and took, instead, those rough hands which gave him every degree of grip, from the gentle squeeze of weak old age to the vice-like hold of a powerful young fellow like Bumper ; whilst such expressions of endearment were bestowed upon him as "Owd craythur, bless thi !" "Aw knew thi feyther, Harry : he're a good chap ;" "Aw wisht aw're like thee, Harry ; aw do, owd brid !" and "Gie mi thi hont, an' aw'll shake it off bi thi' shooter, for th' sake o' thisel and thi moather."

Harry, after much effort, succeeded in disengaging himself from his over-solicitous friends, who would have followed him into the snug, had not the position of George Watson, who was known to be present, inspired them with a wholesome fear of being obtrusive. They, however, compromised the matter, by returning to their old quarters, and becoming as noisy as their lungs would allow ; at the same time expending the force of their sympathy and admiration in frequent wrestlings with John Barleycorn.

The interview between the two young people lasted over a couple of hours. There was so much to be said on one side, so much to be felt on the other, that the time wore on unperceived amid the delirium of sweet and sorrowful incident that hope and retrospect had conjured up. George Watson sketched with the enthusiasm of a pretty painter the magnificence of the future which the other had before him if he would only accept the opportunity offered. America was a grand field for an enterprising spirit ; whilst his honest face and his good common sense, accompanied by a practical knowledge of weaving and other branches of manufacture would, there could be little doubt, ensure his success in the New World. The expense of his outfit George would undertake to defray, beside advancing loans to any amount that might be required. He would also make over an allowance of fifty pounds a year to Harry's mother until good fortune came. George had friends beyond the Atlantic—friends that he had made in business—

to whom he would address letters of introduction ; and what need had a young man of more advantages if these were upheld by personal endeavour ?

All had been said that could be advanced in favour of this new undertaking in which it was proposed that Harry Andrew should embark. For himself he offered not one word of objection. How could he oppose such generous sentiments as George Watson had expressed, or the favours he proposed to bestow upon one to whom he was a comparative stranger ? Harry pondered deeply on these proposals, and weighed the advantages and disadvantages they involved, so far as his limited experience permitted. Not one thought of self mingled with these ruminations. His greatest consideration was how far the change would affect his mother ; the next, would it absolve him in the estimation of Miss Hartley and her friends from his having the presumption to love her ? He should liked to have asked Joe-o'-Dick's advice upon the matter ; but, remembering the old man's partiality for his native sod, and his conviction that, all things considered, there was not another land equal to "dear owd England," he thought it best to take an independent and unadvised course.

"If my moather winno' set hur back up agen it," he found himself saying at last, "aw'll goo ; bo aw could ha' bin content awhoam, an' ha' wovven mi days eawt for o' that. It's hard pikin, too, sometimes, an au've bin soory for t' see mi owd moather mumblin' ith' nook wi' a bid o' dhry bread when aw owt be able

fort' mak' hur nice and comfortable in hur owd age. Neaw aw've a chance, an' if aw dunno tak it, an' hard times should keep bein on us, folks met say aw hadno' done to hur as aw owt ; an' that ud be a sore thing fort' think at."

"I may say, then, that it is agreed between us," observed George, extending his hand to his friend, who seized it in his own and shook it warmly.

"It is," responded Harry, and the eyes of both young men filled as with the friendly clasp their mutual compact was ratified between them.

"A vessel sails on Tuesday next," said George. "We have just time to prepare your outfit, and make such arrangements as may be necessary for your departure. Break it to your mother to-night. She may take on. Any parent would. But a day or two may bring her round, and you would have the satisfaction of leaving her more reconciled to the separation."

"Aw'll tell hur t' neet," said Harry ; "Aw know it'll be same as a buryin' ; bo aw conno' help that. Aw believe it'll be th' best for booth hur an' me, an' that owt t' bring hur to."

As he said this they rose to depart ; but both stood for several moments wrapt in their various and conflicting thoughts, and hesitating to go, as though the first step taken would be to plunge both in a maze of dark uncertainty whence they might not hope to become extricated.

"I would have accompanied you as far as Liverpool," said George, breaking the painful silence. "I

have some little matters to attend to there, and could have made the journey serve two purposes. But I shall be engaged to-day at home. In the meantime you can go down to Manchester, and furnish yourself with such things as you may stand in need of. I will forward you a cheque for twenty-pounds to-morrow morning, which will perhaps be as much as you will require until I see you again. Keep up your heart, and God bless you ! Good night !”

“Good night !” returned Harry, abstractedly.

They had reached the lobby by this time, and buttoning his overcoat, and again extending his hand to his friend, George Watson took his leave. The next parting would be—farewell. Would it be for ever ? Harry wondered ; and the question, as it suggested itself to his mind, held him rivetted to where he stood.

“Harry, come here an’ sup.”

“Harry, Harry, Harry !” called several voices from the taproom. But the young man heard them not. He could hear only the surging of the waves, the howling of the wind, and those fond farewells coming in soft undertones from the lips that had blessed him so often. There was a merry scene before his eyes ; but he saw only a tearful face, and the fading vision of a lovely form giving his heart the last transport its presence could enkindle. Langley-side was only to exist in his memory. His old home—the loom which had rattled so merrily—winter snows and summer flowers—faces that to him were images not

to be broken, must henceforth be shadows only that people his dreams in a far-off land.

With heart and thought full of the change, Harry sought his home. How lovely it nestled there on the hill slope; and, though hard winter bleakness surrounded it, it was a very summer bower to him then. And he must leave it;—the hedges, too, in which he knew the bend of almost every twig; the one apple tree that every spring garlanded the house with its blossoms; the door that seemed eager to open and welcome him as he approached—all, all must be a dream only of the past;—the song of the early “layrock,” the hum of his own bees, the whimpling of the brook, were as chimes on his memory that would grow fainter and less articulate until the grand knell of mortality summoned him to his eternal home.

Widow Andrew had “just mended th’ foyer wi’ a cob,” and was playing with a kitten which she called by the endearing name of “Harry,” as her son entered the house. Why did he look so sad, she wondered, when he ought to have been as full of frolic as the little being she was fondling? Surely he would not have to go to prison again. He had come off triumphantly, with not a spot upon his name; all Langley-side knew it, and rejoiced that it was so. But the youth was sad, nevertheless, and “yonderly,” as the dame expressed herself, as though his lips had never been tuned to a whistle, nor his face brighter than the fire she had made.

"Whatever's do wi' thi, Harry?" she said, placing her hand on the back of the chair as he seated himself in his old "place." "Ther's nowt happent agen, is ther?"

"Nawe," replied the son, ther's nowt happent *yet*."

"Nor beawn to do, I hope," said the mother.

"That's mooar nor aw con say, moather—that's mooar nor aw con say," and Harry fetched up a deep sigh.

"Eh, good lorgus mi' lad! theaw's summut o' thi' mind, aw con see. Theaw hadno use to be o' this road, lookin' for o'th' woald as if theaw expectut seein' summut at th' back o'th' chimdy, or i'th' hess-hole, same as they did i' boggart times. Whatever is it theaw ails?"

"It's nowt aw ail, moather; it's summut awm thinkin' abeawt."

"Then theaw owt tell me what it is. Whoa else bo thi moather should know, an' hoo owt know everythin' sin' theaw's no feyther fort' help thi eawt, an' no—but it's soon enough for *that* yet, though thi feyther wurno' mich owder nor theaw art neaw when he coom to eawr kitchen window th' fust time. Bo what is it theaw't thinkin' abeawt?"

"Aw'm thinkin' abeawt leeavin yo', moather."

"Theaw never art, Harry, surely. An' whatever have aw done wrung, as theaw should leeave mi?" exclaimed the old woman, raising her apron to her eyes, and rocking herself to and fo. "Ha' not aw bin a good moather to thi; done everything theaw wantut for thi, an' kept thi sweet an' howsome? Ha' not aw

wesht for thi, an' cleean for thi, an' mendut, an' baked, an' brewed for thi when aw've bin able. An' what bit of a snicket is ther i' o Langley-side can do mooar for thi, lemmi know."

"Moather, yo'n gotten howd a' th' wrung eend on't," said Harry, seeing that his parent was erroneously ascribing to him very natural motives for his leaving her.

"Nay, aw hanna," persisted the dame, in a pettish tone. "Theaw's seen someb'dy ut theaw thinks 'll do betther for thi, an' thi owd moather may go to th' Warkheawse neaw. Bo, if hoo's a cleean, hard wortchin body, an' good an' farrantly, aw dunna care : tak hur, an' bury me."

"Neaw, moather, aw'll tell yo," said Harry, mustering courage at last to undeceive his parent, by disclosing his real intentions : "Aw ha'no' seen th' woman yet,—aw meean aw ha'no' sed nowt to one ut aw should think ut havin' for a wife, if aw wantut one,—so yo' may be yezzy abeawt that. Bo aw'm gooin' off int' another country, — to Ameriky. That's what aw'm leavin' yo' for."

"Eh, lad, dunno talk o' that ; theaw maks me t' feel os if th' heawse wur fo'in. Thee go t' Ameriky ? Bless mi !"

"Ay, moather ; aw'm settin off next Monday. Ther's someb'dy ut'll see yo're weel done to while aw'm away, an' when aw come back, if aw've had luck, ther shano' be a finer owd lady nowheere nor yo' ; so dunna fret : ev'rythin' is bein' done for th' best, aw'm sure."

It will easily be concluded, by even those who have had the least experience of parental feeling, what a flood of grief followed this announcement of Harry Andrew's intention to leave his native country ; so that a description of it need not be attempted here. The storm, however, was of short duration, calming down into a settled grief, which had even a ray of solace kindling round it, as the darkest cloud hath its "silver lining." The separation would be painful, no doubt, but the prospect of some few years hence being a "fine owd lady," was more than a drop of comfort in the bitter cup ; and Widow Andrew clung to the hope it yielded with the faith of one who always felt her son to be destined to good fortune.

Harry, as the domestic atmosphere became brighter, ventured to acquaint his mother with every particular relating to his interview with George Watson at the "Pig and Fork ;" what a friendship the latter had expressed towards him ; what noble offers of assistance he had proposed. All these details were received with feelings of wonder and admiration by the widow, so that when bedtime came, and she retired to her room, whilst the son mounted his familiar perch, there was happiness once more in the cottage, which, if not of that peaceful character of a former time, still found expression in the gleam of an eventful and more dazzling future.

CHAPTER XIV

MONDAY morning came, and found Birchwood all astir. There was the recurrence of an exciting scene in front of the Town Hall, and as deep an interest felt in the proceedings that were about to take place as on a former occasion. The "Rough-and-Ready Club" were represented, but not in force; Bumper and a companion only being present. There was, however, a greater proportion of what are conventionally termed "respectable" people assembled—tradesmen belonging to various branches of business, who expressed much real or assumed concern in the forthcoming examination at the police court. Hopper was again to be brought before the bench on the former charge of robbing the premises of Mr. Hartley, and as he had before hinted that he should not go to trial *alone*, he had this time for a companion Mr. Joseph Sloper, charged with receiving the property, and knowing it to have been stolen. But as the evidence in the latter case would be similar to that given on the first examination, it might be tedious to detail it here; so leaving our friends to conjecture as to what would be the fate of the two prisoners, we will follow the fortunes of more agreeable company.

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On the other side of the town from that where the petty sessions were held, stands the railway station; this time unusually crowded in consequence of there being many holiday people passing to and fro, and other specialities connected with the season. Several well secured boxes and trunks were lying about, guarded by the attentiveness of an old woman in bonnet and cloak of quite a primitive shape and pattern. These boxes, to judge from the watchfulness of their protector, might have contained an inestimable amount of jewellery; for, whenever any of the railway porters offered to overhaul them, there came forth a sharp remonstrance on the part of the old dame. "Ther my lad's, and touch 'em if yo' darn till he comes. He's nobbo gone wi' a yung felly a seein' Mesthur Hartley somewhere i' th' teawn, an' he'll be back agen e'neaw." Another elderly person, at the opposite end of the platform, was trying to make out the meaning of a highly-coloured placard enclosed in a very pretentious frame, and headed with a somewhat mystical allusion to a number of stars and stripes emblazoned on a streaming pennant.

"Aw'll tell thi what, Ailse," observed this second individual, dragging his clogs along the platform to where the old dame was keeping guard over the boxes, "Ameriky mun be a grand place."

"Eh, ay, Joe, that it is," replied his companion, who had a vague notion that America was planted from Eden, and peopled directly from the Ark.

"They'n mooar stars nor we han," said Joe, who

supposed, from the constellations on the United States flag, that that country was specially favoured with starlight, however it might be in other respects.

"Eh, wheay, han they, Joe?"

"Ay, bo aw dunno think they'n as good mayte an' dhrink, neather. They conno groo porritch theree they sen; nor wutcakes [oatcakes], an' ther ale's wurr nor that owd Jonathan brew'd onct for his pig-killin, ut wur so thin they slat it ont' th' pig in a mistake for waythur. Gie me owd England if aw clem. Heigh, heigh, heigh!"

"Ay an' me too, Joe; an' aw aulus sed if they conno do here, they conno do nowhere; bo theaw sees wavin's gone to Owd Harry, an' what mun folk do ut are as owd at thee an' me, an' never larnt nowt else?"

"Ay, ay, wench; aw art a thick-yeddut foo' that question th' tother day, an he sed we mun do th' best we con; th' yung folk mun larn other trades, an' th' owd uns goo ith' Warkheawse. Aw sed, what mun they do if other trades are full?" an' he sed they mun mak fresh uns. Well, aw never knew no *gentlemen* ut wore clogs, nobbo Black Sam, an' he never would shop no 'prentice, or else aw'd ha bin one o' that trade. Whor, Ailse?"

"An' a good trade, *noather*, Joe, if one could nobbo get a reed on't. Aw should say ther's plenty o' gentle-folk in Ameriky; ther o' so fine when they comn here."

"Aw dunno' know for that. They sen they run to

ther dinner theere, an' if ther above five minits i' aytin it, someb'dy snigs the chear fro under 'em, an' drop'n i' ther place. They'd clem me to th' deeach afore aw'd bin theere a week. Aw dunna wondher at 'em bein so flat abeawt the senglet, an so weeze-bearted, when they swallown ther mayte like cockle broth, as if ther teeth wurn made for nowt nobbo' grinnin with.

"Well ; bo they sen ther's plenty o' good money to be gotten ; an' it isno' sich hard work clemmin when ther's a lot t' run at, as it is when th' buttery's bare, an' th' shop book full. It'll just suit eawr Harry, wheere ther's plenty o' knockin abeawt, an wark for' do. Besides, he'll goo amung great folk, an be thick wi' th' *king*, aw dar' say ; an' when he's gotten a peck o' suvverins he'll come back, an' aw'st be a *lady*. What dost think abeawt that, Joe ?"

"Aw'st be fain t' see it, owd gel. When that happens we'n have a rare doment if aw'm wick. We'n sweel th' thatch off th' top o' yon cote o' thine wi fryin bacon collops, if w'en a pig ready. Bo here he is, aw believe, an' that young chap with him. Thoose new clooas ut he has on favvern bein' borrow'd uns, for he hardly seems to know heaw t' wear 'em."

"Eh, my lad ! He's just like his feyther wur ov eawr weddin' day. Aw dunno feel neaw ut aw could part wi' him. Aw dunno, Joe,—aw dunno. It's like buryin' him,—it is ; obbo then we known what's become *on* 'em, an' we dunno fret for ever."

Sobbing out these sentences, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, Widow Andrew ran to meet her son, who had now entered the station, and was pacing down the platform in company with George Watson.

Harry appeared to have undergone a complete metamorphosis. He was a gentleman in every respect but his gait; and this was so awkward, that we need not wonder at Old Joe saying his clothes looked like borrowed ones. The stiffness in his movements was evidently caused by the clothes he wore, which were an elegant and seasonable suit of strong mixed cloth, well calculated for "roughing it" on sea or land. He had all the raw material of a noble fellow, had Harry, that only required the polishing of good society. George Watson said he would be as "smooth as a new pin" before he had been in America two years, the time he proposed to return, if God should spare him; at which Harry smiled, and tried, for perhaps the one hundredth time, to adjust himself into an easy position in his new "rig out."

"See yo, moather," said Harry, after he had patiently allowed the old dame to stroke her hands over him, and pick off every particle of lint that might happen to be sticking to his coat, "aw've browt yo' summut for a keepsake;" at the same time presenting her with a photograph enclosed in a morocco case.

"Eh! whoa ever's this?" exclaimed the old woman, holding the photograph at arm's length, the better to make out the likeness. "It is no' John Wesley, is it?

Joe, lend me thy spectekles wilta, for aw've left mine ith' wheel-yed, an' aw conno see gradely beawt."

"Mine 'I be too owd for thee, Ailse," said Joe, producing a pair of spectacles that might have been dug out of Pompeii. "Beside," he further observed, "ther *men's* glasses, theaw knows," which remark rather amused the young people standing near.

Widow Andrew, notwithstanding, put on the glasses; and after gazing for some time at the portrait with a somewhat puzzled expression on her countenance, said—

"Wheay it's this yung felly, aw believe," directing her observation to the company, and looking scrutinisingly at George Watson.

Both young men smiled.

"Aw tow'd thi thoose glasses wur th' wrung sort for thi," said Joe-o'-Dick's; "aw con see fro here whoa it is, and beawt spectekles, too."

"Wheay, and whoa is it then?"

"Whoa should it be bo yo're Harry?"

"Eh, nay, it never is. Eawr Harry's a *redder* face nor this. (The portrait, it need scarcely be said, was uncoloured.) Besides it looks as sellit as if it wur gooin t' praich a sarmon; and that lad never lookt so nobbo when he're mopin abeawt i'th' heawse t'other day." But the old dame kissed the portrait for all that, and looked at it again and again, then shook her head and dislodged two big tears that had, no doubt, hung in her eyes all the time and so dimmed the sight as to interfere with the recognition of her son's features.

"If he'd had his appern [apron] on, an' his stookin' sleeves," she afterwards observed, "aw should ha' known him; bo' neaw he's a gentleman, aw conne tell mi own lad."

"All these for Liverpool?" sung out a porter, up-ending one of the trunks that lay near.

"Harry, he's meddlin' wi' thi boxes!" exclaimed Widow Andrew, looking extremely fidgetty about the safety of her son's luggage.

"It's o' reet, moather—th' train's comin'."

This was the signal for the old woman seizing her son's arm, and holding as if it was a thing never to be parted with.

There was a screaming whistle, thrice repeated, heard from a short distance, and immediately a cloud of steam dashed from under an archway, and the screech of wheels signalled the arrival of the train into the station. What a rushing about there was for places by people who were bent upon a journey—all jostling and pushing each other as if they were afraid of being left on the platform! Harry Andrew assisted as well as his parent would allow him, in getting up his luggage, until the last box was hoisted into the van; and now nothing seemed to be required but that one last word—farewell!

But stop; there is a tumult behind, and the order to "make way there—stand aside," causes a crowd of people to move away from the approaches to the entrance door. The appearance of a number of glazed hats among the crowd is sufficient to denote the

character of the new arrivals ; and the certainty is soon discovered when, guarded by two policemen and ironed together, the prisoners charged with the silk robbery—Broadbent and Sloper—emerge on the platform. They had been committed to the New Bailey, there to await their trial at the ensuing sessions ; and as they moved towards the carriage that was to convey them to Manchester, they hung down their heads as if afraid of being recognised by the crowd.

Harry Andrew could not help feeling shocked at this exhibition ; and the contrast was forced upon his mind that existed between the position he now occupied and the one he might have been placed in. But he was cut short in his moralizing by the guard's calling out—

“Take your places,—take your places!” and the loud slamming of doors.

“Come, my good woman—the train's moving off.” This was addressed by a porter to Widow Andrew, now struggling to get her bonnet through a sash in one of the carriage doors. “You'll be knocked down if you don't mind.”

It was all over ; the widow had taken her last kiss, and the train moved slowly out of the station. Round the curve swept the long line of carriages—this time longer than usual ; the engine hoarsely shrieked and puffed out its steam as if in contempt at the many farewells. There was a handkerchief waved from one of the windows ; convulsively it fluttered for a moment, and the next Widow Andrew was alone in the world.

George Watson could not help feeling deeply affected by a parting so novel and so touching, and it was some time before he could prevail upon the old woman to leave the station; though proposing to drive her down to her cottage. She stood gazing towards the tunnel's mouth whence the train had disappeared, as though the cloud of steam that now only hung about like a mist, contained the spirit of her departed son, then gave her hand as a child would, and she suffered the young man to lead her out of the station.

When George reached home he inquired for Miss Hartley; but Maggy shook her head, and said she was in her room, and not to be seen by anyone except her father.

"But I want to see her most particularly," remonstrated George, almost overcome with a dark suspicion that suddenly flashed upon his mind.

"I will tell her, Mr. Watson," said the servant; "but I am afraid it will be of no use: she was so positive."

"What is the meaning of this?" wondered George, as the servant stepped up to her mistress with his message. And his thoughts followed the train that was now far on its way to Liverpool.

The servant returned with instructions that George might see Miss Hartley, but the interview must be a brief one. Endeavouring to divine the cause of all this, the young man sought the lady's room, entered

at the invitation of a cold "Come in," and stood like one transfixed.

"Pardon me, Mary," faltered out George, "but I——"

"Do you visit me as a friend?" interposed Miss Hartley.

"As a friend; and I hope——"

"As a friend or brother, you may; but as a lover, never! I have read your letter, and appreciate your sentiments; but, if you love me, George, never repeat them. I am unwell, and wish to be alone."

CHAPTER XV.

GEORGE WATSON so far understood human nature as to have discovered in Miss Hartley a sentiment beyond a friendly regard for Harry Andrew. Her altered conduct towards himself, so suddenly assumed after Harry's departure to America, was "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ" that the latter's place in her esteem was not to be disturbed by absence, or superseded by a rival attachment. He had misinterpreted her earlier sentiments; had supposed women incapable of such strong friendly leanings, and had gone on calculating from day to day that the affection he had so recently conceived for Miss Hartley would in time meet with a due return. He had hitherto refrained from disclosing his passion other than by vague allusions, which he supposed were unacknowledged from a sense of delicacy arising out of previous intimacy. Time would break down this reserve; and the greater opportunity he now possessed, after the first declaration of his love, would enable him to carry his purpose to a successful issue.

George could not at first bring himself to think that Harry Andrew was a rival. He merely regarded him as an obstacle that it was desirable should be removed. Miss Hartley would never allow a poor weaver lad to presume upon such a misplaced

attachment. Her worldly position alone, if she had any pride in her nature, would render such a choice repugnant to her better sense ; but she might go on from year to year with her little schemes of benevolence ; recognising the winning simplicity of her agent, to the exclusion of such feelings as a woman is supposed to cherish. To distribute alms was the duty of confirmed old maids and inconsolable widows, and not of young ladies in the April of their womanhood. It was the province of the latter to love and be loved ; to flutter through a springtime of blossoming life, regardless of its duller cares, and basking in a summer of ripening affection.

It was with the view of directing Miss Hartley's thoughts and sympathies in another channel, and thus promoting a selfish end, that George had induced Harry Andrew to leave the neighbourhood. But it was not before he had well calculated how far he could reconcile such a proceeding with the approval of a delicately poised conscience. In a worldly sense Harry would be a gainer by his new pursuit ; and, if in him the poor had lost a benefactor, what want was there that his own purse could not supply ? After all sifting, and weighing, and adjusting—balancing this account against that, opposing desires and motives by deeds and their consequences, he arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that everybody interested would be benefited by the change. But George Watson had reckoned without his host, and now that settling day had come, he discovered an item in the account not previously included in his calculations.

On his way home from Birchwood, and after setting down Widow Andrew as near her cottage as possible, George prepared himself for a campaign of love-making. We had fairly got the season on the turn. Days would lengthen perceptibly. A few weeks and the green would brighten over the fields ; buds would appear on trees and hedges ; the lark would be heard in the mid-day sky, and the thrush at eventide. He could almost fancy the primroses were peeping out already ; and then would come the daisies and the Mayflowers ; and the hawthorn would blossom ; and the honeysuckle and wildrose would be hanging over the footpaths ; and blue-bells would be nodding in sweet warm nooks, where quaint old stiles were suggestive of delightful and prolonged pauses in an evening walk. Had he been a painter, what a beautiful landscape picture he could then have drawn ! A deep tangled wood with a narrow path winding through it ; not that the path led to anywhere, but because it lay through a wood, where people would stroll, whether they had business or not, and where the turns were so frequent that almost every rood had its solitude. He would sketch himself with Miss Hartley just reaching the only spot where daylight penetrated. A sunbeam should be slanting about her neck, and he would be gazing into her sweet face, shadowed, as he would have it, by a modest gipsy hat, with a single ribbon fluttering about her shoulders. He would be gazing into her eyes, as in the clear, placid river,—but, before he had completed the picture, the wheels of the conveyance dashed

the snow from the bushes in front of the "Hillock," and he was brought back from the contemplation of that happily wrought summer scene, to the consciousness of deep winter time, and the improbability of Miss Hartley wearing a gipsy hat, with one ribbon.

Alas ! we know not, when imagining the nectar to be brimming over, how soon the cup may be dashed from our lips. We know not, when we behold the face of nature rejoicing in the serenity of sun and sky, and flower-printed meadow, how soon the storm may come and turn the smile to tears ! So was it with our young friend. The chalice was at his lips to be broken untasted ; the fairy scene his fervid imagination had conjured up was to dissolve at once at the demon's touch ; and leaves and flowers, tangled woods and crooked, bowery bypaths turned to chaos. In one moment he had been stricken down, and he felt in the whirling madness of that moment that it mattered not whither the tide of his passion carried him. If he could then have changed places with Harry Andrew, he would have done so ;—anything but remaining here. Once he had the purpose half formed of following his friend to Liverpool, and either sharing the voyage with him, or inducing him to return. But it was too late. Harry would go on board that afternoon, and there was not a train by which George could travel until the following morning, when probably the vessel would be standing out to sea. He could do nothing then but let the torrent of disappointment wash over him until it had spent itself, when there might be peace in the succeeding calm.

George sought his room immediately after that brief but fatal interview with Miss Hartley. He threw himself on a chair and watched the sputtering fire mock his disappointment until he was disposed to be as angry with it as with the cause of his bitter reflections. But as the fuel wasted, his passion abated ; so that after an hour's rumination he felt himself sufficiently reconciled to his defeat to be able to moralise over it. Did he really love Miss Hartley ? or, should he have looked on any other young lady with equal regard under similar circumstances ? He prized her society—that was certain ; and he could share it just the same whether in the capacity of a lover or a friend. In his sincere admiration of her good qualities as a woman, he had never associated them with the duties of a wife. He had not looked beyond courtship, and even that stage of his love scheme had more of the romantic than the real about it. Think as long as he would, this conclusion could only be arrived at,—that whatever sentiments he entertained for Miss Hartley, that young lady had very intelligibly avowed the nature of her own towards himself, so that he might as well make the best of his disappointment. What would be the good of fretting, or taking a more desperate course ? It could only lead to the same result, or something still more painful ; and he could not afford to become the laughing-stock of people who doubtless would take occasion to twit him with his folly. He would sink the lover into the friend and brother, and see if he could not make out as good a

sum of youthful happiness as others more sensitive might out of the caprices and jealousies of courtship.

On the following morning, when the family at the "Hillock" were assembled at breakfast, Miss Hartley was somewhat astonished to observe her recently dismissed suitor demolishing his third round of toast with the avidity of one who had not devoted himself to the sole consumption of moonbeams. He was not over talkative; but allowed Mr. Hartley to comment in lugubrious terms on the proceedings of the previous day, which the old gentleman regarded as the greatest of the many scandals of the trade. His daughter, reserved at first, scarcely allowed her eyes to meet those of George Watson; but this shyness gradually wore off as the discourse became interesting, until she ventured at last to give one of her old confiding glances towards her friend, which promoted the equanimity of the breakfast table in a marvellous degree. George hinted that it was probable he should return to Liverpool as soon as Christmas was fairly over; but Mr. Hartley would not hear of such a thing. Why not stay with them so long as he was welcome; which period would not be limited to either months or years. He might stay for ever if he liked.

"George," observed the old gentleman, rising from the table and putting on his spectacles, "I have a little project in my head that I wish to submit to you. I should have done so before, only this bother we have had with other things has almost driven it away. Let me see; I think I left the papers upstairs." With

that he went out of the room, leaving the two young people together for the first time since their painful encounter on the previous evening.

"What new scheme has your father in contemplation now, I wonder?" said George, as soon as Mr. Hartley had quitted the room.

"Something to detain you, I dare say," replied Miss Hartley, assuming her accustomed manner of addressing her friend.

"And what motive can he have for wishing me to stay any longer here?" said the other, looking purposely confused as he said it.

"The pleasure of your society, of course; you know how my father esteems you;" and a look expressive of sudden pain troubled the girl's face a moment, and then departed.

"But if we must always have those we love near us, how would the whole order of things have to be changed! How many ships would reverse their course on the sea; how many homes would ——" but observing a deep blush suffuse Miss Hartley's cheek, George cut short the sentence he would have uttered, and remarked that a man who had neither father, mother, sister, nor brother to love, could scarcely be said to appreciate fully the happiness their society would create. What on earth was there to fix *his* affections upon any spot?

"Do not I esteem you as a brother, George; and why should you not regard me as a sister?" said Miss Hartley, in a friendly tone. George was silent.

"Forget last night," continued the girl, "and I will be to you all that you could wish, except——"

"Except that which I most desire," said George, finishing the sentence in his own way. "But never mind, Mary, I have learned to look upon some losses as gains, and am prepared to forego that which I can never possess."

"Then you will not leave us, George;" and saying this, Miss Hartley took hold of the hand which Mr. Watson had unconsciously extended over the table, and the relation of brother and sister was, with many tender expressions, from that moment established between them.

Mr. Hartley returned just as the two had ratified the compact, and he would have at once proceeded to explain to his young friend the outlines of a scheme he had been maturing for the better education of poor children, had he not observed the situation which George and Miss Hartley had assumed, and mistaken the relationship it implied.

"Oh, oh! George," exclaimed the old gentleman, patting his friend's shoulders with the papers in his hand; "I see now the reason you are so anxious to leave us. Well, well,—you are a worthy lad, George, and I think Polly's not indifferent towards you. Come, come,—I see I'm not wanted here. I will explain this matter at another time; for the present—bless you, my children,—bless you!" Kind Aaron's heart was full, and he poured repeated blessings upon the supposed lovers as he closed the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

WINTER was past ; spring had strewn the meadows with flowers, and summer basked on the slopes of Langley-side. The transition from the dominion of frost and snow to that of sunshine and fertility, though somewhat sudden and genial, was marked by changes and events that might have been the growth of years. Hopper and his accomplice were serving a protracted apprenticeship to the treadmill, and the firm of "Whiffle and Sloper" was in the *Gazette*. Circumstances connected with the latter event revealed one of the most flagrant instances of reckless trading upon record, and the result of the first inquiry proved a complete collapse of the whole concern. Further investigations brought to light such a system of criminality and profligacy as made honest and well-intentioned tradesmen wary and suspicious of one another. Scarcely an establishment was there in the neighbourhood that had not been victimised to some extent, and to such a stretch had the practice of silk embezzling been carried, that many persons of doubtful character disappeared from Birchwood, under suspicion of having been linked in with the dealings of the bankrupt firm.

The most pleasing set-off against these delinquencies

arose out of the manner in which the manufactory belonging to "Messrs. Whiffle and Sloper" was disposed of. So disgusted were the creditors with the sickening details of the bankruptcy, that it was determined the whole establishment should be put up in one lot by public auction, so as to keep the machinery and material compact, and thus obviate the necessity and expense of dividing into sections property which, in some of its branches, would thus become only so much lumber. The whole was, therefore, knocked down to one bidder, Mr. George Watson, in the name of "Hartley, Watson, and Co.," the "Co." being a gentleman not yet known in his new position, but who is nevertheless an *active* rather than a *sleeping* partner in the firm. This event caused no little astonishment as well as rejoicing in Langley-side, where it had been understood that Mr. Hartley was gradually retiring from business, instead of embarking in fresh speculations. No doubt the worthy gentleman would have adhered to his original intention of giving up, had not George Watson, who was already tired of doing nothing, proposed a partnership in some more extensive undertaking. War had begun to brood over the American States, and a cloud already overshadowed the commercial prospects of Great Britain; in consequence of which, the manufactory at Birchwood went for next to nothing; few being inclined to speculate while the prospects of trade were so perilously uncertain. The new firm, however, could afford to wait until times were better, and as they could

derive some advantages from Harry Andrew's connection with the American trade, most satisfactorily set forth in Harry's latest communication; Watson was quite sanguine of their success. The latter gentleman could hardly be more delighted than was Mr. Hartley with the prospect held out by this new arrangement, and both set to work with renewed vigour in preparation for better times. The little business doing at the "Hillock" had to be removed to the Birchwood establishment, whilst the former place was converted into a school, where Mr. Hartley proposed to carry out his scheme for infant education.

With these fresh attachments to society and its affairs, the summer, to George Watson, appeared an unusually short one. At business during the day; in the evening taking pleasant strolls through wood and meadow; and the pleasure often enhanced by the society of Mary Hartley, now so sisterly in her regard for him,—what more agreeable occupation could any gentleman desire? And then the little family gatherings at the "Hillock;" the musical parties in which old Aaron's nervous bass, George's fine tenor, and Mary's delicate treble united so harmoniously as to give the music a character beyond the mere pastime of an idle hour. And the card parties, too, where George would be more dissatisfied with winning than losing, often making misdeals on purpose to be chided by lips from which gentle reproach was sweet;—what a round of pleasant life the young fellow was enjoying!

The changes introduced by the failure of Messrs.

"Whiffle and Sloper" had a most wholesome effect on the condition of Langley-side. The homes of that impoverished village had begun to smile again; for, contrary to all expectations, the business of "Messrs. Hartley, Watson, and Co." continued to improve, several good orders having been received through a new channel from America. Weavers' wallets, instead of being mostly tied in a napkin, and carried empty under the arm, could often be seen slung over the shoulder, laden almost to the staggering point with warp and weft. The "Pig and Fork" was noisy on Saturday evenings, and "baking days" had begun to be the rule instead of the exception. Bright faces and contented homes were again in the majority, affording Mr. Hartley agreeable testimony of the happiness he had been the means of dispensing.

So the winter of 1861, if it augured ill for Lancashire generally, found Langley-side comparatively prosperous. Shuttles merrily moved once more, and "bearings home" to Birchwood were stripped of those painful associations that lately characterised the dealings of Messrs. Whiffle and Sloper during their disastrous influence upon the fortunes of these suffering people. The following summer brought equal prosperity, and the year might have so continued to the end, had not a most distressing episode interrupted the general harmony.

One morning, during the fall of 1862, George Watson had taken up the newspaper, previous to his going to business, when the first item of intelligence

that caught his attention was the failure of a noted banking company in one of the principal cities of the United States. Good God ! He had nearly his whole fortune invested in that concern, and ruin stared him in the face.

George, after reading this announcement, immediately communicated the circumstance to Mr. Hartley. The old gentleman was, as may be supposed, sorely distressed on hearing the news, but more on his friend's account than his own. For himself he felt prepared to meet the storm whatever might be the result, although considerable caution would have to be exercised. The manufactory must be closed until the arrival of the next American mail, if not for a longer period. Of course he was most reluctant to take this step, as it would tend to weaken the confidence of creditors, and cause great alarm besides distress amongst the workpeople ; but there remained no alternative, for it would be perilous to keep the works going with such an uncertain future. A notice was accordingly posted over the gateway of the factory at Birchwood, announcing that no more work would be given out until further notice, and that such as was in the looms must be held back until required.

There was consternation everywhere expressed as this unwelcome news travelled over the country side, and a gloom settled upon the villages immediately affected. A meeting of weavers took place in Langley-side, at which, after mutually bewailing the consequences that must fall upon them in the event of a crash

at Birchwood, an address of sympathy to the principal sufferers by the casualty was passed unanimously; old Joe-o'-Dick's being appointed to wait upon Mr. Hartley and Mr. Watson, and express by "word o' meawth," as his instructions directed, the substance of the resolution.

Nowhere in Langley-side was the news more unwelcome than in the cottage of Widow Andrew. Unless she received from her son more favourable accounts than had hitherto arrived, there was every probability of the Workhouse being her future home; for she could not expect her monthly stipend from George Watson, now that he was involved in such losses. It had been the custom of Miss Hartley to call occasionally upon the lone woman since Harry's leaving home, for the purpose of imparting consolation, and adding little comforts to her limited store. Accordingly she had undertaken, at the request of Mr. Watson, to break the sad tidings now afflicting the whole neighbourhood, if the poor widow had not heard them before; and for this purpose Miss Hartley, as soon as evening had set in, took her cloak and bonnet and, with the little dog that always accompanied her, went over to Langley-side.

Ill news flies rapidly, and Widow Andrew had heard all. She sat with the fire nearly out as Miss Hartley entered the cottage,—moaning most piteously over a misfortune which she regarded as peculiarly her own. Whatever her visitor advanced, she refused to be comforted, connecting, as she did with motherly

reasoning, the sad event with the mysterious silence of her son.

"Summut's happent my lad, aw'm sure," she persisted in saying; and that wur a sign *on* it when th' drawers gan a crack yesterneet, an' aw could no' help lookin' at his bed same as aw thowt aw could see him lyin' in it. Th' clock-case dur flew oppen that neet ut his feythur dee'd, an' a pon-lid rowlt across th' har'stone. Aw'm sure summut's happent."

"You have heard nothing of your son for some time, then," observed Miss Hartley, who might have spared herself the remark, as she already knew the exact date of Harry's last letter.

"Eh nawe; never sin that day ut Sam-o'-Joe's kilt his pig, an' aw know its o' etten," replied the widow, a fresh flood of tears following the recollection. "Owd Joe thinks ut through this war, letthers conno come as soon; bo then we should get 'em sometime. He mun be deead;—he mun be deead!"

Miss Hartley started. She had been looking towards the window, and she imagined there was something shadowed in the faint light beyond it. The object might be a human face, but it must have been a dark one, as it was so indistinct; and the young lady yielded herself to a momentary impression that it was some presentiment of evil connected with the cracking of the drawers as the old dame had described.

Widow Andrew, without noticing her visitor's alarm, commenced running over a succession of fancies that had been haunting a mind, so easily impressible to

superstitious ideas. The sound as of a hand on the latch, however, interrupted the stream of discourse that had set in, and then a young and handsome stranger presented himself at the "spear," to the no small surprise of the widow and her neighbour; surprise heightened to alarm when, taking off his hat, he advanced to salute the former. He was an impudent stranger, the old lady thought; and though the fashionably clipped beard that concealed the lower portion of his face bespoke him to be a *real* gentleman, the manner in which he threw his arm over the bed-gown expressed so much ungentlemanly assurance, that the person upon whom the offence was committed remonstrated with him most characteristically upon such conduct.

"Whoa are yo, yo brazent felley!" she exclaimed, "comin' a-clippin' an owd woman like me o' that fashin, an i' mi owp heawse, too? Ger off wi' yo!"

Miss Hartley would have said "For shame, young man," only a glance from the offender somehow interfered.

"Mother," the stranger cried, "don't you know me?"

"Eh, Harry; eh, my lad, is it *thee*!" and the old woman threw her arms round her son, and sobbed out such terms of endearment as to completely overpower him.

Miss Hartley would have given worlds to have been absent at that moment; and yet the door was open—why did not she leave at once?

"Eh, Harry,—aw thowt aw mut never ha' seen thee

agen, aw did," exclaimed the widow, clinging to the young man's arm, which she would rub and pat as if to insure her a fuller sense of its reality. "Aw've had thi deead, an' dreawnt, an' kilt monny a time o'er, an' aw con hardly think neaw it is thee. Bo it is thee, Harry ; is it no' ? Eh, my lad !"

"Bless you, mother. I told you I'd make an *old gentlewoman* of you, and I've come to redeem my promise," said Harry, giving his parent's hand another affectionate wring. "But I wish to have a word with this young lady, if you can spare me," he continued, glancing towards Miss Hartley, who, although confused, was not an uninterested witness of the joyful meeting.

"Have twenty, Harry ; have a hundert wi' hur , for hoo's bin a good soul to me," said the mother, seeming hardly to know which to admire most, but certainly inclining towards her son.

"Miss Hartley," said Harry, holding out his hand, which the lady accepted with less reserve than he was prepared to expect,—“We meet again.” He could get no further ; a tenderness in the look he encountered prevented utterance,—and he gazed into those loving eyes,—loving they must be—until a sudden transport flung aside the barriers that had held the two asunder while their hearts were one, and their lips met to seal for ever the bonds of a life-tried, heaven-approved affection.

Both young people were so overcome with this sudden but delightful episode in their strange relationship,

that it was some time before they awoke to the consciousness that Widow Andrew appeared to be taking a very complete impression of the interesting scene before her, which fact she indicated by several times lifting up her hands and uttering such exclamations as—

“Eh, Harry! eh, the aw pouement! Well, if ever!” &c., which she supplemented by a very natural reference to her own courting days, expressed in the observation—“Thi feyther to o’ th’ would; he’d just ha’ done th’ same.”

“My dear Miss Hartley,” said Harry, “how does the happiness of this moment repay me for past sorrows! The joy of meeting my mother; the assurance that I have not indulged a hopeless love; the gratification of now being able to return kindness to those who have befriended me, excites such a feeling of rapture that I can scarcely believe it other than a dream. Had not Mr. Watson prepared me for this reception, I should indeed have been bewildered. To that gentleman I am bound in eternal gratitude, and must go this very night to give him additional proof of my respect.”

“Art the aw for leavin’ me so soon?” inquired the mother.

“For a short time only, mother,” replied Harry, in an assuring manner. “I heard in Liverpool of Mr. Watson’s supposed misfortune, and hastened hither to relieve him of his anxiety. The account with the New York bankers I withdrew in Mr. Watson’s name,

as his agent, on my first intimation that things were unsatisfactory; and I have deposited the whole amount with a respectable firm in Manchester."

"God bless you for that," exclaimed Miss Hartley, forgetful of her situation in the joy she felt.

"And God bless you for it, too," responded Harry. "It was your image, and the hope it inspired, that cheered and encouraged me in all my undertakings. Had it not been for you I should probably have been still at my loom, toiling for a bare existence, instead of——. But I must not let my tongue run on so fast, lest I should make a braggart of myself. Come, Mary,—Miss Hartley, I mean."

"Call me Mary."

"Well, Mary, then, I must see Mr. Watson, and escort you home, which, I need not say, will be a delightful duty."

"Awa'st goo, too, Harry," interposed the mother, in a most peremptory manner. "Aw con walk behind yo', if theawrt feeart on mi yerrin' what yo han' t' say; but aw'm noa goin' be laft misel so soon."

This natural inclination of the old lady was got over by a convenient compromise. They would leave her at Joe-o'-Dick's cottage until Harry's return, where she might indulge in a cup of her favourite "tea and rum" with the old weaver's family, recounting the glad tidings. To this arrangement she consented, reluctantly at first, but afterwards cheerfully, when reflecting on the joy her visit would spread around. So, reaching out her cloak, and tying on

the bonnet which still retained the "dinge" received by being thrust into the railway carriage two years before, the old woman prepared for setting out.

How short was the walk up to the "Hillock;" how joyfully were the pair received; and what transports followed Harry's joyful communication to George Watson. It would be difficult to say which was the happiest spot, the "Hillock," the little cottage on Langley-side, or Old Joe-o'-Dick's hearth, the last as bright as if every face around it had been newly polished; Old Joe's face in particular being set with twinkles more than ordinarily luminous. Mr. Hartley was in ecstasy; and if George Watson did not feel as delighted with the favours Miss Hartley bestowed upon his friend, as if he himself had been the favoured one, we must place that weakness to the debit of poor humanity.

When Harry Andrew returned home, he found Langley-side in what some of his acquaintances would have termed a "blaze." The "Pig and Fork" was overflowing with uproarious merriment; the very windows seeming to "chink" with rejoicing. Harry could not forego the desire to call; so he stepped in, and, as soon as recognised, found himself "shooter height," and carried about like a very amiable "guy" for the edification of the company. Over the village the news of his arrival from America had rapidly spread, and dispelled the gloom at once. It was predicted with some truth that the notice put up at the Birchwood factory would be withdrawn in less than

twenty-four hours, and that Langley-side would again rejoice in the prospect of plenty of work and the generous consideration of kind employers.

That night Harry slept in his old bed over the loom; but he was too excited to whistle, as was his wont in former years. He fancied he might have done so, however; for, on awakening from a sweet reverie, he was startled by his mother calling out, "Harry, theaw, pousement, wilt husht?"—a circumstance the old dame remembered not in the morning, which showed she had been engaged in pleasant dreams of the past.

Christmas-day came again; and if the morning might not be outwardly sunny, there was brightness within doors. The bells of old Waverlow rang so merry a peal, that some people declared the like had not been heard since the wedding-day of Sir Hugh Horton. This was to be a wedding-day; and a happier pair than the one which drove down the avenue leading from the "Hillock," that morning, never brightened the church by its presence. Harry Andrew and Mary Hartley were these happy people; George Watson and "Maggy" followed as bride's-maid and groom's-man, with a retinue in their wake such as no village except Langley-side could have furnished. Joe-o'-Dick's was "poting" about in a bran new pair of shoes, and gaiters of becoming fit—his clogs and wellers having been consigned to the chimney-nook for a day or two, at the least. Lung Yeb had brought

his hunting staff as a memento of the sagacity he displayed on a former Christmas when tracking footsteps in the snow ; and the two, considerably elated by the "possett" they had imbibed, married the young people twenty times over on their way to the church. A flag floated all day over the factory at Birchwood, and the rejoicing in Langley-side lasted until Saturday at midnight ; when the host of the "Pig and Fork" intimated to the company who were making merry there, that if they stayed any longer the floor of the tap-room would be worn through with their dancing and stamping.

What a cheer rang forth as Harry Andrew and his bride emerged from the church porch after the ceremony had been concluded. What blessings followed them on their way ; and as the two carriages receded in the distance, what eyes strained to catch a last glimpse of the happy people they contained ! All over the country the expressions of joy went forth. People talked about the event for weeks, and the toast that superseded every other when "The Queen" had been acknowledged, was the one which suggested the title of this story—"THE LAYROCK OF LANGLEY-SIDE !"

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